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## Film in a State?

A discussion of the state of film production in Ireland

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## Introduction

Film production in Ireland has seen a varied level of activity throughout its history. In terms of the global film industry Ireland has been a relatively late starter in developing a consistent level of indigenous filmmaking. In recent years film production in the Republic of Ireland has seen several changes to its structure and policy made with the intention of encouraging a vibrant filmmaking culture and industry.

These changes have been the result of a development of structures originally proposed in the 1960s. The effect that these changes have had on the filmmaking environment in Ireland since the 1960s and the subsequent development of a directed approach to future film production will be discussed. This discussion will focus primarily on the approach of independent filmmaking in Ireland due to its relevance to Irish culture. The distinction of addressing independent film production as opposed to mainstream film production is necessary to identify the effectiveness of indigenous film structures and Irish filmmakers in film production in Ireland. In the case of mainstream Irish films, that is films shot in or about Ireland for a wide international audience, there is an influence from the overseas production and distribution companies involved with them. This influence comes through the investment which is needed from outside of Ireland for such films. The input of overseas investment into Irish films provides little return of capital into the Irish economy. This money also brings with it the responsibility of commercial return and therefore the need for international audience appeal. As will be discussed later a need for universal intelligibility and commercial success has the effect of compromising the relevant Irish content and tends to rely on stereotypical forms. For these reasons mainstream film in relation to Ireland is of less relevance to Irish culture and of less financial benefit than indigenous independent production.

Consideration of the cultural and financial implications of the



approach taken by film production structures in Ireland will be taken discussed in relation to independent production. To facilitate this discussion it is necessary to view the development of film structures in Ireland in its a historical context, since its emergence in the 1960s, up to the contemporary situation. This will be done with reference to specific films produced by Irish filmmakers. These films are chosen to identify different elements of filmmaking which cover a range in cultural and financial terms.

During this period the emergence of a coordinated approach to film production in Northern Ireland has also occurred. This development, a more recent and therefore less mature process, will be discussed with the intention of comparing and contrasting the approaches to film production in the North and South of Ireland. The geographical similarity coupled with the political and cultural difference of Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland provides an interesting comparative analysis of the two regions. Through this comparison and the placing of Ireland in context to film production in other countries the effectiveness of the structures and approaches put in place over the years can be viewed.

The hope of this thesis is that through analysis of the structures affecting film production in Ireland a clear idea of its potential and assessment of its most appropriate approach for the future will be made possible.





## Ardmore Studios

While some attempts to encourage an indigenous growth of talent and technical competence in Ireland had occurred - notably the setting up of the Ardmore studios in the 1950s, the first significant attempt at coordinating an approach to indigenous film production in Ireland came in the late 1960s. Through a series of articles in 'The Irish Times' by the film producer Louis Marcus and a personal address to the then Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, by the American director John Huston, the case for the establishment of an Irish film Industry was made. This proposal was followed up and in November 1967 the Minister for Industry and Commerce appointed a Committee of 24 persons from the film community and Civil Service to assess the needs and problems involved in establishing an Irish Film Industry. Huston was appointed chairman and Louis Marcus was part of the committee. A report was completed in June 1968. It made references to filmmaking practices in France, Poland and Czechoslovakia citing the success of their low budget feature films as stemming from the short story films of these countries. The report also recommended,

That the Government should establish a Film Board which should have the positive function of furthering and encouraging the development of an Irish feature film industry. The Board should not engage in the production of feature films; its role should be the creation of conditions in which others interested would be likely to do this and the stimulation of those interested to undertake the task.

(FLYNN, Arthur, 1996, pg 88)

The main activities set out for the Board to address were;

- distribution agreements
- co-production agreements between Irish filmmakers and those of other countries
- training facilities
- provision for other facilities necessary for film production

- the making of recommendations to the Government in relation to the Irish film industry
- establishment of a national archive.

The report also made recommendations for financing film production in Ireland. A distinction was made between European type films for which the then average budget was given at IR£50,000 and Anglo-American type films for which the average budget was then given at IR£200,000. The report suggested that in order to gain a roundly based film production sector in Ireland that European type films should be given full funding while the Anglo-American films should be partly funded with a ceiling of IR£10,000 in the development stage.

(in FLYNN, Arthur, 1996, pg 88)

These suggestions made by the report were drawn up as a Film Bill in 1970 but it was not enacted until a decade later. The Bill was introduced to the Government in December 1979 and proposed that the new Film Board would have funds of £4.1 million for productions to be shot wholly or in part in the State to be disbursed over a four year period through grant or loan. The Bill met with strong opposition from the independent film producers and Irish Film workers which resulted in the formation of the Association of Independent Producers of Ireland (AIPI) to stand against the Bill. This situation was rectified by the appointment of the chairman of the AIPI, Tiernan McBride, to the board after the Bill was finally passed through the Dail in 1981. Muiris Mac Conghail, Head of Television Features at RTÉ, was appointed chairman of the Irish Film Board and Michael Algar, chairman of the Irish Film and Television Guild, was appointed chief executive. The board's objectives were stated as being "to assist and encourage by any means it considers appropriate the making of films in the State and the development of an industry in the State for the making of films." (FLYNN, Arthur, 1996, pg 88)

The establishment of the Irish Film Board was a significant development for film production in Ireland, yet the board got off to a controversial start receiving more opposition from the AIPI for its funding of Neil Jordan's 'Angel'. This was the only film to receive a grant in the first year and this decision angered the AIPI due to the fact that John Boorman, a member of the Film Board, was also



the executive producer of the film. Boorman was also chairman of the National Film Studios of Ireland (NSFI) a source of further irritation for Tiernan McBride due to the losses and money wasted by the troubled Ardmore studios, "money which they (Irish film producers) could have used themselves, and often more money than the Film Board has now." (DWYER, Michael, 1997, pg26) This period at the start of the Film Board's launch was a time of unrest in the Irish film sector. The place of Ardmore studios and its commercial viability had for many years been the subject of discussion.

The studios were built in the late 1950s, the vision of the Louis Elliman (Managing Director of Ranks Film Distributors in Ireland) and Major General Emmet Dalton, who after his involvement in the foundation of the State had worked as a producer in London. They opened in Bray in May 1958. The idea was that the studio would attract American and British producers to film in Ireland thereby passing on technical knowledge to Irish crews and so make Ardmore the basis of an Irish film industry. This assumption that a natural relaying of knowledge would take place was not strengthened by any provision in policy for training and staffing of Irish film technicians in the establishing of Ardmore. The resultant vacuum was quickly filled by British technicians selected from the ranks of the British film union. Ardmore in effect became an extension of the British film industry, of the sixty or so films shot in the studio between 1958 and 1972, most were produced, directed and serviced by foreign crews. This led to labour problems and after industrial action by the ETUI (Electrical Trade Union of Ireland) the image of the studios was further weakened.

Financial difficulties plagued Ardmore throughout its existence due to the lack of a constant turnover of production. The studios were put into receivership by the ICC (The Industrial Credit Company) in 1964. From then the studios had a number of owners, all without financial success. In the early 1970s John Boorman who had previously used the studios for his films including post production on 'Deliverance,' brought his futuristic film 'Zardoz' to be filmed at Ardmore. Boorman, like Huston, had a zeal to see a film industry in Ireland develop yet recognised the lack of structure for such development,

I get my financial backing from America and can make my films anywhere I choose. I would prefer to make them in Ireland. but for a filmmaker who looks for finance here, there is simply no structure of film finance. 'Whom do I ask? To whom do you go?'  
(in FLYNN, Arthur, 1996, pg 108)

This financial structure had been there in the form of the Film Industry Bill since 1970 yet had not been implemented by the Government. In July 1973 Ardmore was put up for auction, in a surprise move RTÉ bought the studios for £390,000 on behalf of the government. RTÉ were to maintain the studios until a Government body was set up by the Minister for Industry and Commerce. This Board was the National Film Studios of Ireland (NFSI) with John Boorman as the chairman and senior RTÉ producer Sheamus Smith as managing director. Boorman spoke of the Government's intention of maintaining the studios and increasing training for Irish film technicians. These plans were to be put in place with the Film Industry Bill but with a General Election the Coalition Government was defeated and Fianna Fáil returned to power. The Film Bill was to be another six years in waiting. The injection of money needed to modernise the facilities of the studios was not forthcoming from the Government and the studio continued to lose money, the National Film Studios Ireland came under criticism. According to Vincent Corcoran, NFSI Board member,

Excalibur tied up the studio for nine months and only yielded rental payment of £65,000. They had a Cecil B. de Mille complex, concentrating on attracting big foreign productions, where they should have put more effort into getting independent finance for Irish films. The Government should sell the studio if they are unable to ensure that it would continue to be used for film production.

(in FLYNN, Arthur 1996, pg 124)

This difference in priorities between attracting large overseas production companies to film at Ardmore studios and involving indigenous filmmakers was the source of animosity between the NFSI and the AIPI. The belief of the NFSI was that money would be channelled into an Irish film industry by having large productions





filming at Ardmore, the centre round which to build an industry. Yet with no structure for employment the training and development of an Irish work force capable of manning the studios did not occur; therefore, any money invested by the Government into Ardmore was not being returned to indigenous filmmakers. Independent filmmakers saw themselves as the centre piece of any developing film industry and as such sought the financial backing to operate. Without a structure for receiving such finance most Irish filmmakers were not capable of filming feature films at Ardmore so it was viewed as a drain on Irish filmmakers. Sheamus Smith said,

...neglect by successive Governments left the studios in an impossible financial situation ....The lack of capital and apparent unwillingness to provide it by the only shareholder, the State, meant that the company was burdened by a continuing need to increase bank borrowing, not for production or badly needed capital investment, but merely to pay interest on bank loans. This activity was seen by many independent filmmakers, and as a filmmaker myself I must agree, justifiably so, as a drain on State funds which might otherwise have been available for profitable investment in production.

(DWYER, Michael, 1997, pg26)

These words were delivered at the 3rd Celtic Film Festival, a festival which demonstrated the split between the Independent filmmakers and the established state body with a boycott of Neil Jordan's 'Angel'. The chairman of the AIFI explained the protest as, "the logical continuation of a position based on morality that we took up." (ibid.)

In response John Boorman said,

I don't think this petty attitude is worth discussing. It was a relatively small investment (in 'Angel') from the Film Board. The Film Board will have its £100,000 back before the end of the year, plus their share of the profits. How could we have given money to Irish filmmakers when they had boycotted the Board? I have to constantly remind myself that they are a group of malcontents and mad dogs. They are in love with martyrdom, they are in a position to make films. Instead they complain. (ibid.)





Such exchanges demonstrate the division in thinking and loyalties between sectors in Irish film at the time. On the 2nd of April 1982, during the festival, John Boorman resigned his chair of the National Film Studios Ireland and as a member of the Film Board. The following day, the then Minister for Industry and Commerce, Albert Reynolds, announced the closure of NFSI, amidst public outcry.

### The Irish Film Board

The irony of closing the National Film Studios Ireland was that it came at a time when the Film Bill was finally put in place and a Film Board was starting to take shape. The recommendations layed out in the Huston report were in some way being carried through but the overriding problem seemed to be a lack of funding, in John Boorman's word before his resignation, "The problem with the Film Board is that the money at their disposal is so derisory. It's not enough to make one half of one decent film." (ibid.)

The Board was funded by the Department of Industry, Trade, Commerce, and Tourism. This funding increased until 1985 with the intention that the investment would work as a revolving fund, return from the successful films would be re-invested into other productions. The total funding between 1981-87 is as follows:

#### Grant in aid to Irish Film Board 1981-87

| Year | Administration<br>IR£'000 | Capital<br>IR£'000 |
|------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| 1981 | 10                        | 200                |
| 1982 | 62                        | 390                |
| 1983 | 77                        | 400                |
| 1984 | 103                       | 500                |
| 1985 | 120                       | 550                |
| 1986 | 112                       | 500                |
| 1987 | 100                       | 520                |

(Coopers & Lybrand, June 1992, 5.65)



During the period 1981 to 1987 the Board part funded, through the loan system introduced, 10 full length feature films, 20 short films and documentaries for television, and 15 experimental 'shorts'. Development loans for the pre-production stage and script development were given to roughly 60 projects. In total the board advanced IR£1.247 million to the feature films. Of these ten, eight films received a total of IR£3.295 million which was mostly spent within the Irish economy which indicated that from a basis of initial backing Irish film producers were able to procure further financial backing from foreign sources. This reflow of money back into the economy was three times the funding put into the projects by the Irish Film Board. Of the money advanced by the Irish Film Board, by the 21 February 1992 IR£.106 million or 8.5% of the total had been repaid. This poor return and the failure of the revolving fund intended to re-invest money from successful projects into less commercial projects meant that the Film Board could be viewed from a financial point of view as failing. For this reason the Film Board was wound down under instruction of the then Taoiseach, Charles Haughey. The Arts Council was to be responsible for funding under its statutory function to promote the Arts; film somewhat reluctantly falling into its domain. This decision was met by widespread opposition and its effect on film production in Ireland was felt with a decline in the low to medium sized budgets.

To view the first Film Board as failing in its duties to film in Ireland would be a harsh judgement. It did make a positive contribution to a number of areas of film production. The fact that the Board provided a solid basis of initial funding on which producers could build was an important benefit to indigenous filmmakers. There was a limited amount of finance provided for overseas training of a number of students to attend the National Film and Television School in the UK, and the Tisch School of Art attached to New York University as well as the organisation of an eight week intensive course taken by Kieran Hickey, Donald Taylor Black and David Collins to help fill the gap experienced by Irish filmmakers. The Board helped to raise the profile of Irish filmmaking through its presence at the major festivals promoting the films and facilities offered for producers in Ireland, also

improving the market awareness of distributors to Irish films. This benefited the Irish producers by centralising the marketing and thereby helping to cut the individual marketing cost for each project. The Film Board considered the perception of Ireland after the five years as being "a small but important filmmaking country." (Coopers & Lybrand, June 1992.) During the six years twenty short fiction films/documentaries were made for television and fifteen 'shorts'; along with this the Film Board awarded funding to festivals helping to provide the platform on which to show the shorts, an ideal learning tool for future producers, directors, writers.

These elements of the Film Board's activities were dissipated with its cessation in 1987.



### Section 35

As had been recommended by the Huston Report (to be implemented alongside a functioning Irish Film Board) the Government made amendments to the 1987 Finance Act, Section 35, to enable tax write offs for companies willing to invest money into films. This spelled out a change of tack by the Government regarding finance for filmmaking away from the State sponsored system of subsidy to a reliance on investment from the private sector. Without any initial support from the Irish Film Board the stress for the producer was on the commercial as opposed to the cultural, experimental or artistic aspect of a film. The intention was to create an Irish film industry through the need for capital return without the safety net of the Irish Film Board for producers.

The 1987 Finance Act introduced Section 35 for an initial period of three years which was extended in the amendment of Section 28 of the Finance act 1989, Section 48 of the Finance Act 1993 and most recently the 1996 Finance Act, extending it to 1999. This extension has been due to the success of Section 35 in tapping into the private investment sector. The original form of Section 35 proved to be inflexible and unsuccessful in relation to its later amended form: IR£11.5 million was raised between March 1987 and March 1993, whereas in 1993-4 Section 35 raised IR£55 million and in '94-'95 it was IR£95 million. This upturn in investment came about as part of a set of changes put in place by the then Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, Michael D.Higgins.

The telling change made to Section 35 was to raise the financial limits for maximum investment by a company in one year from IR£200,000 to IR£350,000 and the investment over a three year period from IR£600,000 to IR£1,050,000. The 75% rule which stated that not less than 75% of the production of the film must be carried out in Ireland was amended. It was changed to state that any film having less than 75% but more than 10% of it produced in Ireland would be subject to assessment by the Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht. The Minister would decide if the film would receive a certificate deeming it as qualifying for the

full Section 35 money, the same as if it had reached the 75% mark. This amendment negated the problem of losing potential co-production projects under the Irish/Canadian Co-Production Treaty, and more importantly it allowed for use of Ireland's membership of Eurimages to gain from the 20% funding of the budget for a producer working with partners from two other member countries. The 60% rule, which stated that not more than 60% of the cost of a production could be raised through Section 35 investment, was amended. The amended rule stated that if any production had less than 60% of the production work carried out in Ireland a limit on the money raised through Section 35, to pay production costs, would be imposed. This limit on the production costs would correspond to the percentage of production work carried out in Ireland, (ie. If only 30% of the production work on the film was carried out in Ireland, then only 30% of the production cost could be raised through Section 35 investment). Another amendment was made for the benefit of low budget filmmakers, the Section 35 break, previously only open to companies, was opened to individuals for investments of up to IR£25,000.

All these amendments made Section 35 investment more attractive for producers. Yet the system does not suit everybody. The difficulty for producers can be with the necessity to provide evidence of a marketing budget in the project. With private investors there is a much stronger need for a guarantee that there will be a return. For this reason a pre sales agreement and completion bonds are often necessary in the investment package. This can be difficult for new Irish producers. As a consequence, some consider the Section 35 investment money as not creating a sound basis for a self reliant film industry and that any long term financial set up through private investment will not be achieved while the tax break system is maintained. Yet Ed Guiney, an experienced producer, states that without Section 35 investment neither 'Ailsa' or 'Guiltrip', both debut films from Irish directors which he produced and have had positive effects on Irish filmmaking, would have been made. Ed Guiney suggests that the encouragement of Section 35 to make producers look at funding in a more commercial manner is how a strong basis for an industry will be made, "Section 35 rewards the entrepreneurial spirit of





those Irish producers who go out and get pre sales in the international market.”(FLYNN, Roddy, 1995, pg 11)

Ed Guiney argues that indigenous filmmakers will form the basis of a future domestic industry and therefore Section 35 should be made more user friendly for low budget films; if the benefits to be gained from overseas production funding are not fed back into a development of indigenous talent then the opportunity is wasted. To this end Ed Guiney recommends,

the department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht should prioritise low budget Irish films, not because that is a good thing to do but because it is the smart thing to do. By and large, small Irish films are worth more culturally, give better experience and training to Irish technicians, give better breaks to Irish casts and are directly using new Irish talent. Finally, if commercially successful, the profits from such are repatriated to Ireland.

(FLYNN, Roddy, 1995, pg 11)

Some would argue against the use of Section 35 in the development of an industry, proposing that the movement of free market forces should be sufficient to generate investment, the claim being that State subvention creates an artificial environment and is not the foundation for real development. A much touted argument for this would be the reference to the US as being the strongest film industry in the world and having no State subvention; yet in 1969/70 when the world film industry was in deep crisis the US put in place a tax credit scheme which allowed the industry to grow. The Australian film industry, one which was referred to on a number of occasions in the 1980s as an industry on which Ireland should model itself, had tax breaks and production money available during the 1970s allowing the successful development of their film industry. This need for a state funding and private sector tax break system is recognised as benefiting Irish producers as a complementary pairing. The two must work together; without development money from the Irish Film Board it is difficult to attract investment from Section 35 to complete the project, without Section 35 money the project cannot be finished and the State money is wasted. The two systems are intrinsically linked. For this reason when changes to Section 35

were made in 1996 the concern was that they were too hasty in reducing the effectiveness of what had proved a valuable source of raising capital.

The main changes were to the percentage of company profits permitted to be invested in Section 35. This was lowered from 100% to 80%, this limit of 80% was applicable to individual investors also, in effect cutting the saving of the investor on profits by 20%. The 75% Rule was amended, corresponding to the 60% rule, the Section 35 investment level would relate to the percentage of the film having been produced in the State. If 35% of the work was carried out in Ireland then 35% of the budget could be raised through Section 35. For films with a budget of £4 million or less, the limit of Section 35 investment was set at 60%, for films of budgets £4 million to £15 million the limit was set at 50%. The maximum amount of Section 35 investment was set at £7.5 million for films with budgets of over £15 million. These changes to the 1993 Section 35 were met with disapproval from producers in Ireland and abroad, particularly in the United States where previously the tax incentives implemented by the Irish Government were considered as one of the best in the global film industry. This prompted a trip to the United States by Michael D. Higgins on what was deemed a damage limitation exercise, evidence that the importance of overseas investment in maintaining a high level of activity in the film sector in Ireland is not to be underestimated.

Michael D. Higgins, from the start of his office in 1993, introduced several other parts of an integrated package intended to aid the development of filmmaking in Ireland with a rapidity that surprised many. The main parts of this package were;

- the reactivation of the Irish Film Board
- the passing of requirements in the 1993 Broadcasting Act to ensure that 20% of television production must come from the independent sector
- the decision to establish an independent TV station to assist independent production of Irish language programming - TnaG
- STATCOM was set up; a committee of all stage agencies involved in the production of the audio-visual industry in Ireland.

(McCABE, Caoimhe, 1995, pg 16-17.)



## STATCOM and Training

STATCOM commissioned a major study into the training needs of the industry with particular reference to the independent film and television production sector. This report was given to Fás, the training authority, and they had the responsibility for establishing the National Training Committee.

The Committee set about implementing the report "Training needs to 2000" as set out by STATCOM. The Committee draws members from institutions involved in training, industry and arts. Its recent success has been the running of a traineeship with Ardmore Sound. World class practitioners were engaged to run the course which provided 15 trainees with placements based mainly in New York and Los Angeles including the new Spielberg film 'Saving Private Ryan'. Other projects during 1997 were the Arista Story Editor Workshop held in Wexford during 1997, the filmscoring course with tutors from UCLA, scriptwriting courses in comedy and Irish language. Tony O'Connor, Chairman of the NTC says,

The National Training Committee, to be known in the future as Screen Training Ireland, is working towards ambitious goals in the training arena. Fuelled by the vibrancy and growth of the audiovisual industry in Ireland, the focus is to create a solid skillbase amongst practitioners and to contribute to the building of an infrastructure that will ensure this industry continues to thrive into the 21st Century.

(Ireland on Screen, 1997-98, pg 31)

This optimistic attitude toward the future of a film industry in Ireland is a refreshing opinion to be heard from those in charge of training, an indication of the growth of indigenous employment. The problems previously associated with training, the reliance on hands-on learning from overseas crews during shooting, 'a looking over the shoulder' approach seems to be starting to be addressed. What is not evident is any further linkage between film production and third level education as discussed by Sarah McCarthy after the publishing of the STATCOM report 'Training Needs to 2000' (Ireland

on Screen, 1997-98, pg 31). The courses offered at third level were found by the Report to be geared toward school leavers without provision for practitioners and mature entrants. The NTC has gone some way to addressing this problem by the initiatives in Ardmore sound, and the organisation of scriptwriting courses, previously not available; yet the need for more of a hands on approach to third level education which would make the courses more relevant to the industry is still needed.

### **Independent Productions Unit**

In response to the Broadcasting Act of 1993 RTÉ established the Independent Productions Unit (IPU) to utilise the productions in the Independent sector and expand the diversity of television programming on Irish television. In November 1993 Claire Duignan was given the job of heading the newly formed IPU. From its inception the IPU has developed in accordance with the Broadcasting Authority (Amendment) Act 1993. This development has seen funding for IPU commissions from the independent sector increase from £5.5 million in 1994, £7.3 million in 1996 to a projected expansion to £12.5 million or 20% of the television programme expenditure in the preceding financial year, whichever is greater, in 1999. This is set to increase the 1997/98 commission of 300 hours per annum of independent productions substantially. (Ireland on Screen, 1997-98, pg 8.) This increase will be of benefit to the independent sector providing a more acceptable level of commissioning. The role RTÉ has played in the audio-visual industry would be deemed as shirking its responsibility as a national station in providing an outlet for independent production. The changes made in commissioning move towards rectifying that situation. One project which was taken on by RTÉ and has proved successful is the short film series 'Shortcuts'.

Dnt? →



## Shortcuts

'Shortcuts' was put in place through joint funding from RTÉ and the Irish Film Board in 1995. It provided funding for six films with a budget of approximately £38,000 per film. The idea of giving each film the same budget was intended to provide some sort of level playing field, a notion which was described as "ridiculous" by Damien O'Donnell, director of 'Thirty Five A Side', "They were six different dramas, each one with different needs. Giving the same budget to everyone would only have created a level playing field if we were all working on the same script." (KEENA, Colm, 1996, pg 25) This grievance did not change the guidelines to individual budget consideration but the time constraints of the TV half hour were changed to anything between 10 and 26 minutes which created screening problems for RTÉ but allowed for a greater range in the films. The budgets for the film were increased also after feedback from the filmmakers and from Pat Keenan, Secretary of the Film, Entertainment and Leisure Branch of SIPTU, his claim being that the films' budgets were impractical and that people had to 'bend over backwards' to facilitate the production. Despite the problems the 'Shortcuts' scheme has become a successful project for encouraging young or first time talent in film production and the Irish Film Board and RTÉ continue to provide funding for it annually.

The promotion of the 'short' by the Film Board has been as a result of concerted effort to increase the profile of the short film in its own right. The backing of the festivals in recent years, most notably Cork, has made the 'Short' an important vehicle for the fledgling filmmaker. For some the 'Short' should be an art form on its own but for many it has become the tool for learning the trade, the interim between no experience and the first feature. Frankie McCafferty, a first time director with the film 'Brood' recently shown in the IFC and in the Galway festival is of the opinion that shorts are becoming too tight and losing the improvisational feel of the format,



FIG.1

There are some great films showing in Cork but I don't think that they're proper shorts. They're almost like showreels for people who want to make features, they're really slick and really good. They need to use their money a bit more imaginatively, some of the shorts are like trailers for the feature.

(Frankie McCafferty, interviewed by the author,  
Nov 1997, App. pg XX)

This is an interesting point when considered alongside Damien O'Donnell's comments on his film 'Thirty Five A Side' (one of the more successful films from 'Shortcuts') before its viewing in a shorts series on BBC2. His opinion of the film reflected that he considered it to be a success on the basis that it had provided subsequent work in commercials; a potentially lucrative business but not one which has much bearing on the development of film production in Ireland. This is a view that would enforce Frankie McCafferty's point that some shorts have become too involved with creating films that look good and entertain without engaging the viewer on any greater level; perhaps a symptom of playing safe to ensure the possibility of subsequent funding or work. This attitude, apparent with Damien O'Donnell, if allowed to prevail in the making of short films would stifle the creativity of possibilities in the 'shorts' medium and usurp the reasons for their promotion. The difference in attitude toward filmmaking and its reception can be seen between the film's of Damien O'Donnell and Frankie McCafferty.

## Brood

Frankie McCafferty's first experience on film was with Joe Wall, on a "throwaway piece of mayhem called 'The Birth of Frank Pop'"(ibid.) The eleven minute manic exploration into the life of Frank Blank and his existence in Drabland follows his metamorphosis into Frank Pop through a triumph over dullness and boredom. The film cost £7,000 and took a year to finish.

When we took 'Frank Pop' around the festivals we went to Hamburg which is a short film festival and we saw some incredible stuff which obviously had nothing spent on it, we were in a



low/no budget round where you had to state what the budget was in your blurb on the film, there were films made for twelve quid, twenty five quid and some of them were great. (ibid.)

This awareness of the ability to produce something different on a low budget obviously affected Frankie McCafferty in choosing to shoot the poem 'Brood' written by Ian Kilroy as a first film. McCafferty was keen to move away from a straight Irish drama for a first direction project. The poem and the film start with the Papal visit to Ireland in Galway 1979. This event is used by Ian Kilroy to reflect the attitudes and identity of the nation at that time. It was a defining moment for many of the generation and in the poem the event is used as indicative of a period of innocence which contrasts strongly with the society we now have. The focal line of the poem is repeated to assert this image in the narrative through the film, "I have here the testimony as yet unspoken by the Galway Pope lovers whose hearts are broken"

The poem identifies with the eighties, a doldrum time of frustration for many in the pre-Celtic Tiger era of Charles Haughey, their anger expressed through the pointlessness of empty brooding. It plots the change from the simple optimism of the Papal visit to the generation without a cause,

We have not sworn allegiance  
To tri coloured cloth or  
the number thirty two  
we have not suffered the  
hand of tyrannical fathers  
or the coloured cane.

The film is narrated from the text by McCafferty, intercut with Super 8 footage of, at first, the Papal visit and later images of New York - suggesting the yearning to travel and the voice of the diaspora. The intention was to create a muted and suitably brooding feel to the run of the film, helped by a moody soundtrack by Joe Wall (ex-The Stunning). The feeling is created successfully and the strength of the poem is translated through a rhythm of movements, although at times the film's action seems to be somewhat static in its simplicity contrasting to the strong poetic imagery used. This reluctance to develop the film's action

ultimately emphasises the film's reflectiveness. This point distinguishes the film from its contemporaries in content and category. The film was produced on a budget of £46,000 and has a running time of just under thirty minutes which would suggest that it would be considered as a 'short' yet the director and writer are reluctant to see it shown as such,

'Brood' doesn't really fall into the same category as shorts which is why it's hard to get it shown without being in the midst of a lot of shorts where it doesn't really fit. It's then being read in a bad context. 'Brood' has the logic of a poem and in the way an image in a poem disappears and goes underground and comes back developed in a different way later on is the way the film works, it has its own logic, it hasn't got the narrative logic which a short has. Then if you're going to watch it with shorts you're not really going to know what to do with it.

(Ian Kilroy, interviewed by the author, Nov 1997, App. pg XXI)

'Brood' is an example of the Film Board's ability to enter into funding, separate from private investment in a non commercial project. Frankie McCafferty is convinced that 'Brood' would not have been made without the assistance of the Irish Film Board, despite the eager support of Thomás Hardiman of Parzival Productions who may well remain at a financial loss. The film would not have been able to attract the funding necessary for production from private investors. This situation shows the benefit of the Film Board in funding projects which provide a broader range of films in Ireland but without the promise of commercial success.



### **Irish Cultural Identity**

Although there have been several successes in the international market for Irish films during the 1990s, mainly these have been films funded from America and other sources outside of Ireland and therefore conscious of the reception of the film by audiences outside Ireland. While raising the profile of Ireland to an international audience the large scale Irish success films of recent times; 'The Crying Game', 'In the Name of the Father', 'Michael



Collins' have been made by already internationally established directors; Neil Jordan and Jim Sheridan, and this has done little in practical terms for furthering a film industry or cinema in Ireland. Irish audiences on the whole are reading such films through the eyes of Hollywood. The international commercial film industry can dictate the manner in which Ireland is portrayed in an international arena. The strength of the American film industry is such that it can influence Irish filmmakers in perpetuating Irish stereotypes viewed through American Cinema.

To offer an axiom to Celtic filmmakers; the more your films are consciously aimed at an international market the more their conditions of intelligibility will be bound up with regressive discourses about your own culture.

(Colin McArthur in HILL, John, 1994, pg119.)

This point illustrates the difficulty for Irish filmmakers to make films which remain relevant to Irish culture while still benefiting from international success.

### **I Went Down**

The recent success in Ireland of 'I Went Down' and the comparative success of 'Some Mother's Son' and 'Last of the High Kings' is indicative of the growing awareness of a market in Ireland for indigenous films. 'I Went Down', directed by Paddy Breathnach and produced by Robert Walpole, who with Breathnach make up Treasure Films, could be viewed as an important film for an Irish film industry. Unlike its contemporaries in Irish film 'I Went Down' does not address typically Irish issues, it uses Ireland as a context within which to work and does not force its 'Irishness' on the storyline. This treatment in an Irish film reflects a confidence which is expressed in the film's willingness to take on the genres associated with commercial cinema while avoiding excessive dilution of the characters or storyline. As Paddy Breathnach explains,

I felt that I wanted to create a film that was going to be seen widely by an Irish audience in multiplexes and right across the

country. I wanted to capture their imagination and wanted them to take the film out of the cinema, copy some of the lines, imitate the gags, enjoy and revel in the characters, and hope that those characters would go into and expand the panoply of Irish types that are seen in movies. We wanted more than anything to engage with an audience and I think that was the core starting point.

(POWER, Paul, 1997 pg.17)

This awareness of the audience and desire to engage with it in the film are something which is brought across by the interplay between the two main characters Git (Peter McDonald) and Bunny (Brendan Gleeson). The relationship between the two men follows a love/hate 'buddy' format. Their mutual debt to a gangster forms the central dilemma. The plot and character roles at the heart of the film are familiar from the genres of the gangster and road/buddy movie. Yet it is the lack of social commentary on the actions or need to provide a judgement or answer for the characters that leaves enough room for the situations to work in the film. The traditional theme of rural and urban contrast is dealt with by the landscape shots; low shots of the open bogland, similar to the landscape backdrop of 'Eat the Peach', are used to show the arrival in a different territory. This is the journey that Git and Bunny have to undertake between the Dublin City gang and its counterparts in another area. The realm of gangsterland is not elaborated on to imply drugs or terrorism, the setting of two opposing factions is enough. This balance in the film, the familiar form of the plot, with its sympathetic central characters, has allowed 'I Went Down' both critical and commercial success, an important combination in a second feature. The first feature Breathnach directed, 'Ailsa', was very different to 'I Went Down'. It dealt with sexual obsession and death, a dark and sinister story of the decline of a person. "Ailsa was a puritanical first film whereas I wanted this ('I Went Down') to be an ebullient, more exuberant film." (ibid.)

Released in 1994 'Ailsa' was successful for a first feature. It won the Euskal Media Award of £250,000 (of which half was invested in 'I Went Down') and ran for four weeks in the IFC, yet was not widely seen in Ireland, which gave Breathnach an awareness of the audience and led to 'I Went Down's' success in Irish cinemas. This is the first, second feature success amongst the

I Went Down

film in a State?



FIG.2



recent Irish directors. David Keating's 'Last of the High Kings', Terry George's 'Some Mothers Son' Gerry Stembridge's 'Guiltrip' were first features for these directors. This bodes well for the future.

In some ways I think 'Ailsa' had more craft in it, but I've learned a lot more about story and payoff. I definitely have another good bit to go but the energy is there. But I don't think its just us (Treasure Films) either - I recognise that in a lot of people, just talking to other filmmakers and looking at shorts. A much more rigorous approach to work is being conducted now, people are challenging themselves a lot more. (ibid.)

One important part of the success of 'I Went Down' was the deal struck with Buena Vista for its distribution in Ireland and the UK. On the 3rd of October, 50 prints of the film were released in the Republic. In comparison: at its height 65 prints of 'Michael Collins' were made. This level of distribution shows the confidence that can be expressed in an Irish film.

## Northern Ireland Film Commission

Northern Ireland has maintained a high media profile over the last twenty to thirty years. The political and sectarian divisions with their accompanying violence have drawn global attention to the Northern Ireland situation. The perceived ubiquitous instability within Northern Ireland along with its divisions from its neighbours, Britain and the Republic of Ireland, have not allowed a growth of an audio-visual industry in Northern Ireland. The requirements for the making of an audio-visual infrastructure in Northern Ireland were assessed in a report commissioned by the Independent Film, Video and Photography Association. The report, called 'Fast Forward', was published in 1988. From the findings of the report the Northern Ireland Film Council was set up in 1989. It was initially a voluntary organisation but, from 1992, it received funding from the Department of Education. The Northern Ireland Film Council remained until its structure was assessed. The report, 'Structures and Arrangements for the Support of Film Culture and the Film Industry in Northern Ireland', was commissioned in June 1996 by the Departments of Education and of Economic Development for Northern Ireland. The main findings from this report were;

- the existing mechanisms at the time provided little support for the film sector, these needed to be strengthened.
- Recent experience in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland indicated that development would take place more quickly if there was: a focus put on the industry, finance provided for development, effective training structures, and advice on marketing.
- A unified screen agency to be set up based on Scottish Screen to provide strategic leadership for the sector.
- A development fund to be awarded on a loan basis.
- Investment in production to be focused through the ACNI's Lottery Arts Fund.

The report led to a reorganisation of the Northern Ireland Film Council. On April 28th 1997 the Northern Ireland Film Commission was launched. Its main activities are listed as being;

- To promote the province's locations, talent and facilities to international film and television producers, and to assist them when working in the Province
- to operate the Northern Ireland Film Development Fund for producers
- to advise the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) on all applications to its Lottery Arts Fund for film projects
- to act as Sector Training Council for the broadcast, film and video industry in Northern Ireland
- to take responsibility for the funding and development of Queen's Film Theatre in Belfast and of the Nerve Centre in Derry
- to continue to develop media education through initiatives including the Foyle Film Festival and the Cinemagic International Film Festival for Young people.

(Fleishman-Hillard Saunders (Press Release), April 97.)

The Northern Ireland Film Commission replaces the Northern Ireland Film Council as the centre of the development of an indigenous film industry.

The main priority of the Northern Ireland Film Commission at the moment is to attract overseas producers to come and use Northern Ireland as a location. This is the main thrust of the Commission's plans for the next few years with the development of an indigenous industry running in tandem with it. The means by which overseas producers are to be attracted is through the development fund which provides stg£15,000 for a feature and stg£40,000 for a series, to be paid back with a 50% premium on the first day of shooting, that is to say if the loan is stg£10,000 then stg£15,000 must be returned. Andrew Reid, the Locations Manager for the Commission agrees that these figures are not entirely revolutionary, but is confident that once producers have made the initial effort to come and see they will be interested enough to use Northern Ireland as a viable place to film,



They may look at that (Development Fund) and say they're not going to take it but the point is they're already here, they're already looking and hopefully at that point we can negotiate on our terms. From there on we push the locations very heavily, we assist them in finding the locations, we assist them in tying down their script to specifics. When they have their locations we introduce them to crew and hopefully get them a local production manager. Our main aim is to get people looking at Northern Ireland in terms of writing scripts, we believe that it is a script driven location although the scripts don't have to be about Northern Ireland.

(Andrew Reid interviewed by the author, Jan 1998, App. pg XXXIV)

Although the funding for development offered may not be enough on its own to attract overseas producers to work in Northern Ireland the Commission is quick to point out the additional benefits of working inside the UK. One attraction for foreign producers is the return of VAT (Value Added Tax), a situation which does not exist in the United States, the return of VAT, 17.5%, on hotel bills can be a very attractive bonus for American producers (the commission assist in setting up a UK company allowing the VAT to be claimed back from the exchequer.) Also the cost of living in Northern Ireland is considerably less than many other countries in Western Europe leaving it cheap to film there. These financial benefits are made known to producers yet it is the idea of presenting Northern Ireland as a location that appears to be the main initiative for the commission, an understandable goal with regard to reversing twenty five or thirty years of adverse media coverage of the 'Troubles'

To this end the Commission has produced a glossy picture postcard brochure in the Tourist Board vein advertising Northern Ireland's many picturesque areas and concentrating the emphasis on the contrasting landscapes in Northern Ireland all within two hours of Belfast (one tongue in cheek claim is that the only thing Northern Ireland cannot offer is a desert). These publications have been touted at Cannes, an indication of the primary objective felt by the commission in pushing Northern Ireland's locations.



This is a time when there are a lot of productions coming to Northern Ireland which might not necessarily have done so in the past. Going to Cannes demonstrated our confidence in what we can do here, and producers are always looking for that confidence from a film commission.

(Cini, Summer 1997, pg 4.)

The confidence that Richard Taylor speaks of comes at a time when changes in Film Policy in the UK are being looked at with regard to rationalising the approach to film, finance, production, development, exhibition, distribution and training.

Richard Taylor recognises the affect that a motivated Labour Government through Michael D Higgins had on the establishment of effective policy for film production in Ireland and with the similar situation in Britain, now under 'New Labour', it is hoped that a comparative policy can be implemented in the UK.

On the 2nd of May 1997 the Labour Government came into power, by the second week in May, Tom Clark, the Film Minister, and Chris Smith, the Secretary of State for Culture, were in Cannes to announce the finance available from the Government for film production, 30 million pounds to be divided between three franchisees or consortiums responsible for the distribution of funds to the different regions of the UK. This influx of money is intended to create a more stable basis for film production in the UK, an indication of Government backing for the UK film industry, present for at least a full term of office - 5 years.

The Northern Ireland Film Commission is not a statutory body and is not set up as a permanent Board but it distributes part of the money that is allocated for the Film Industry by the Government. This definition of the commission's status as an organisation is something that they are seeking to have clarified, along with stating the need for a separate production fund for Northern Ireland in the future.

At the moment the funding that the commission handles is part of a package that the Governing bodies in Northern Ireland set out in December 1996, it is a four million pound package which is divided between the commission and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Two million pounds of the money is channelled to film

production through the Arts Council Lottery Fund. This production fund is awarded in loans to films with the recommendation of the commission. One million pounds is available to the commission through the special support programme for peace and reconciliation. Of this million pounds, stg£600,000 is being spent on development loans, stg£400,000 is being spent on the promotion of locations in Northern Ireland and building an infrastructure for an industry. The remaining one million pounds is from the Department of Education which is divided between administration costs of running the commission, funding the Queens Film Theatre and its festival, funding the Foyle Film Festival in Derry and the Nerve Centre and also funding for any initiatives for training. The plan for the four million pound package is intended to run over a two year period when the funding arrangements are to be changed. The commission would like to see a separate production fund for Northern Ireland implemented at that stage.

### **BBC Northern Ireland**

The BBC has been responsible for most of the film and television drama production in Northern Ireland over the last decade to the extent that a well used adage, until recently, was, 'of course there's a film industry here - it's called the BBC'. Yet the majority of any larger BBC productions have been shot in the Republic of Ireland such as 'The Hanging Gale' and 'Ballykissangel'. This has come about through the 'Extending Choice' plan implemented by John Birt in 1993. It changed the set up of commissioning in the BBC. The previous organisation of the BBC had centred on Shepherds Bush, London, as being responsible for all production. This involved central departments requiring most of the money available for drama production thereby leaving regional areas to contest for low budget funding for their own production. The changes from 'Extending Choice' decentralised film production, allowing regional areas to compete for large production money for specific projects to be viewed across the network. When 'Extending Choice' started making decisions on which developed scripts were



to be put into production at the start of 1994, those chosen were set in the Republic of Ireland. Although subsequently 'Ballykissangel', also set in the South, was commissioned from BBC Northern Ireland, Robert Cooper, Head of Drama BBC Northern Ireland is confident that this is not a reflection of any lack of scripts set and shot in Northern Ireland. He is confident there will be an industry developing in Northern Ireland over the next number of years. This growth can be aided by the development of the film initiatives Channel Four and BBC2 have followed. In particular 'Film on Four' has provided the opportunity for film funding in Ireland, both North and South, through its commitment to funding films dealing with minorities - the Irish being one of the largest minority groups in Britain, and Northern Ireland having high profile issues of representation.

BBC NI invested stg£346,000 in developing scripts set in Northern Ireland in 1996 and these writers will move on to more productions in Northern Ireland. One Northern Ireland writer who received funding in 1996 for script development is Colin Bateman for his short film 'Jumpers'. The film was part of the 'Northern Lights' programme which was set up between the Northern Ireland Film Council, BBC Northern Ireland and BBC2 in 1994. The scheme was an opportunity for new talent to access development and production funding for scripts set in Northern Ireland. The first funded film was 'Skin Tight,' written and directed by John Forte and produced by David Kelly and was shot in Belfast in September 1994. Two films followed this in 1995 which received stronger funding of stg£45,000 each. The Northern Lights scheme continued until the changes to the Film Council were implemented.

### **Colin Bateman**

The benefits of such schemes in Northern Ireland are now evident with the filming of two Colin Bateman novels now in post production for release in the summer of 1998, 'Divorcing Jack' and 'Cycle of Violence'. 'Divorcing Jack', a Scala production, has a budget of stg£3 million pounds making it the largest film ever to be shot in Northern Ireland. 'Cycle of Violence' has a budget of



stg£1 million and is made up of an all local cast. 'Divorcing Jack' is a definite tester for the film sector in Northern Ireland, the largest budget film to be entirely shot in the North. One statistic the Northern Ireland Film Commission is proud to note is that 56% of the crew on the film were from Northern Ireland, an achievement for such a fledgling industry. The film received substantial backing from the Arts Council Lottery Fund and is produced by Robert Cooper, an indication of the level of commitment to creating a success out of the first major undertaking in the new environment for film production in Northern Ireland. Colin Bateman indicates the expectation, "I think Robert (Cooper)'s basically taken a leave of absence for 'Divorcing Jack'. He's not sitting at his desk in the BBC. He's very much involved in this. We all have very high hopes for it." (CLARKE, Jim, 1997, pg 26.) With 'Divorcing Jack' and 'Cycle of Violence' both set to be released during the summer of 1998 and a further Bateman screenplay, a light comedy caper about kidnapping the head of Oliver Plunkett, scheduled to commence filming in Northern Ireland in early 1998, the current film environment is obviously in favour of Bateman's work. The novels provide a satirical look at the 'troubles' from the view of a Unionist reporter, Dan Starkey, trading on the indigenous black humour of Northern Ireland. This viewpoint is one which has largely been without voice in any part of the arts or entertainment. Although the novels are not in any way political comments, and the films need not subscribe to political rhetoric, what does present a challenge will be the ability to reflect the humour and attitudes of Northern Ireland without relying on the now overworked genre of the IRA thriller. For Bateman the opportunity is available,

All of the films to come out of Ireland in the last twenty years have been from the Republican side of things. I wouldn't say that I was redressing the balance, because they're not political films, but it is a more balanced look at what goes on over here. There genuinely hasn't been a lot of culture coming out of the Unionist or Protestant end. I think things are looking up at the moment. (in CLARKE, Jim, 1997, pg 27.)



FIG. 3



## Première

Short film production has retained a place in the plans of the commission with joint funding from Belfast City Council, Ulster Television and British Screen coming together to create the Première scheme, an opportunity for young filmmakers from Northern Ireland to make five short films, each approximately ten minutes long with a budget of stg£18,000. The first round of films was completed in September 1997. The five scripts were chosen from over 100 submissions. The films selected were; 'Charming Celia', 'Gort na gCnamh' (Field of Bones) 'Silicone Valerie', 'When the Dust Settles' and 'Flying Saucer Rock'n'Roll'. Viewing the films overall one noticeable point is the willingness to submit comedic scripts. The commission had no previous intention of specifically choosing comedies, the scripts were chosen for those with the most potential. The only film without any light or comedic treatment is also the only Irish language film of the five, 'Gort na gCnamh', based on Cathal O'Searcaigh's poem of the same name, about domestic violence set in rural Ireland. Première's leading film is probably 'Flying Saucer Rock'n'Roll'. Set in 1958 in Northern Ireland and shot in black and white it is a throw back to the B movie horror. The film tells the story of Eddie Manson (Ardal O'Hanlon) a young man fixated with Americanisms, "We'll save the kids from this crazy jazz" who has to fight off the invasion of man eating aliens and save the girl. Although a sci-fi spoof, the film is not without reference to the Northern Ireland context; after defeating the alien's paralysing sonic beams, Eddie declares, "No more kids in muddy fields tranced out of their heads on electronic music, ..and definitely no more huge explosions." 'Flying Saucer Rock'n'Roll' shows the progression of director and producer Enda and Michael Hughes, along with Cousins pictures (writer Mik Duffy and production designer Denis O'Hare), from their first film venture 'The Eliminator'.





FIG.4

## The Eliminator

'The Eliminator' is a feature film length spoof thriller in the tradition of the video nasties of the 80s such as 'Bad Taste' or the 'Evil Dead'. Its own billing describes it as 'Ireland's first high octane, non stop action, low budget spoof thriller', 'Madder Than Max, Dirtier than Harry'. The story line, fitted in between copious shoot outs, a 13 minute car chase, a Vietnam flashback and numerous glory lines, ("Don't call me chicken, I've got a chainsaw") is a sprawling ramble following Stone, a special agent working for the 'Organisation' attempting to reclaim 'The Viper', a specially constructed vehicle. After returning to Ireland without the Viper, Hawk, leader of the Organisation, kills Stone. This results in Stone rising from the dead with an army of zombies intent on seeking revenge and culminates in the raising of St. Patrick and an apocalyptic finale. The end credits of 'The Eliminator' are very aptly accompanied by the Northern Irish punk band Stiff Little Fingers' song 'Alternative Ulster' an appropriate song for a very alternative Northern Irish film. 'The Eliminator' was made for a total of stg£7,500 which was raised out of personal funding. The budget for 'Flying saucer Rock n' Roll' proved to be a tighter budget to stick to, the team had been used to being their own bosses before. The tighter stricture of an imposed budget made for tighter controls, yet the film suits its budget and shows the elements of humour and irreverence apparent in 'The Eliminator' with a much more competent finish, the benefit of working with a more experienced crew. The director of photography on 'Flying Saucer', Seamus Mc Garvey, another young filmmaker from Armagh in his twenties has just finished working on Alan Rickman's new film, 'Winter Guest' showing the emerging talent in Northern Ireland gaining experience.

Enda Hughes did not initially contact the Irish Film Board to look for funding for 'The Eliminator', thinking that they "wouldn't be interested in what we were doing" (LINEHAN, Hugh, Friday 19th July 1996.), doubtlessly right after being refused money for post production. Yet the film received repeated acclaim at festivals, most notably Galway. This indicates the impact of a film that is



truly different to its contemporaries and raises the question of why so little experimental film is being explored by young filmmakers in Ireland. Although 'The Eliminator' is bereft of any serious cultural content, it is a valid contribution towards broadening the approach of Irish filmmaking in the context of Northern Ireland. It is a conscious effort to present a view that there is the possibility to produce films which operate within the context of Northern Ireland without trying to explain the 'Troubles' on a high political plain. In Enda Hughes' words, "We didn't want to make another film with 'who shot my Da' and all that stuff." (LINEHAN, Hugh, Friday 19th July 1996.)



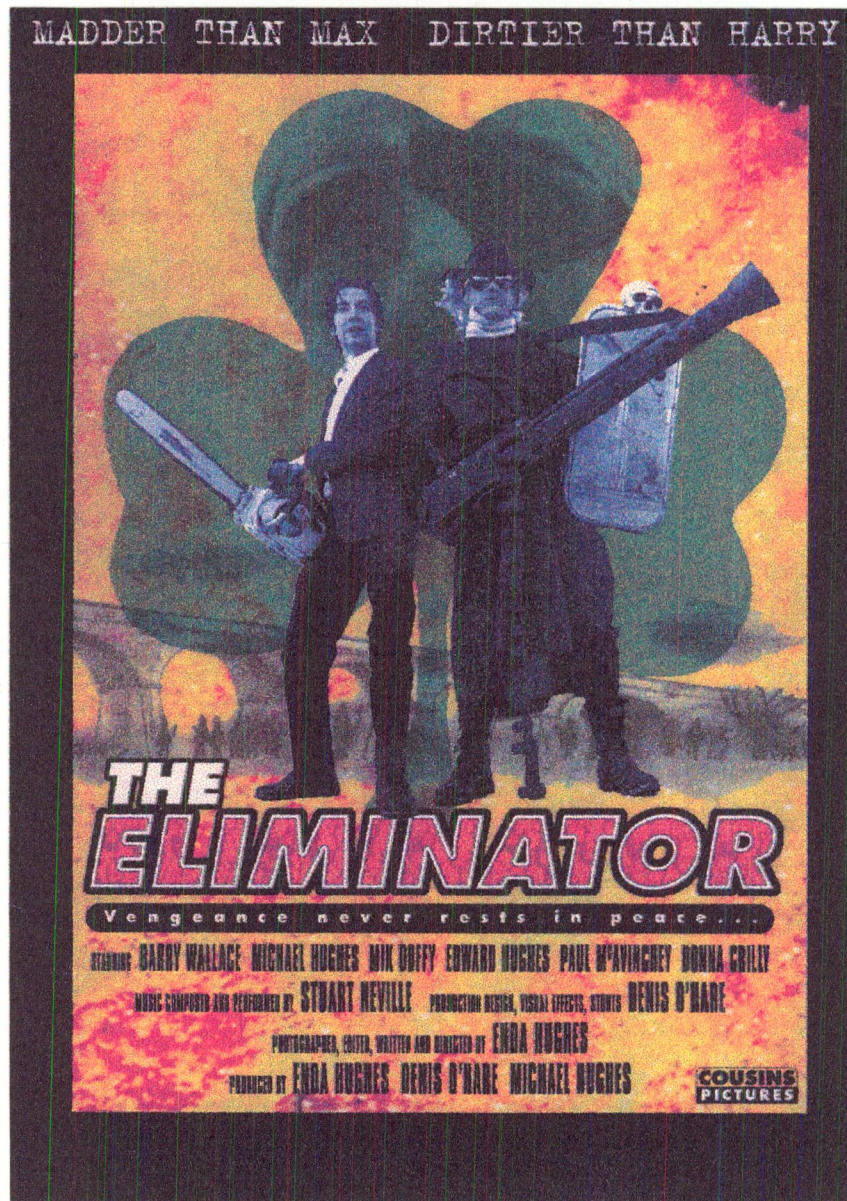


FIG.5

## Conclusion

The position of the Republic of Ireland in terms of a global film industry is that of a small (and peripheral) but important filmmaking country. This is the reality in which film production in Ireland should be considered. Ireland has the potential to make important and successful films but this importance and success must also be viewed within the context of its realities.

The freedom of content and context of filmmaking is aided when the strictures of commercial conscience are lightened. This is apparent from films such as 'The Eliminator' and 'Brood' - films, from first time directors, which stand out for their individuality. Creating the means by which Irish filmmakers can produce innovative and interesting film is very important to the growth of cinema in Ireland both North and the South. Such a situation can only be brought about by increasing film production by Irish filmmakers for Irish audiences. The strength of big budget American films over the rest of the global industry is too great to contest. The idea of creating an opposing pan European big budget film industry is both impractical and unnecessary. The position of an Irish or Northern Irish film industry within such a pan European industry would not be of benefit to the production of culturally relevant film in Ireland. European film is distinct from the 'universalising' discourse of Hollywood global cinema due to its position within a culturally diverse 'regionalism' (John Hill in McCLOONE, Martin, 1994, pg 6.). The need is for development of Europe's regional cinema, not to create competition, in the same vein of discourse, for Hollywood. To this end, such smaller regions of film production within Europe, as Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are, must form an industry or cinema which is suitable to their position.

The Scottish film industry and the Irish film industry, North and South bear similarities in their peripherality with Europe. The Northern Ireland Film Commission has as yet an undefined future due to its fledgling position and non quango status. Yet its infrastructure is based on the model of the Scottish Screen Agency.



The Irish Film industry is at a point where it needs to develop upon the gains it has made since the relaunch of the Irish Film Board. According to the Chief Executive of the Irish Film Board, Rod Stoneman, "There is no such thing as an Irish film Industry, nor is there ever likely to be one" (LINEHAN, Hugh, 1994, pg 13.) This comment, made at the Film Base Annual general Meeting on 27th March 1994 in the Irish Film Centre may seem unduly negative but it was justified by Stoneman through the point that production structures outside of America follow a more 'artisanal' approach to film, relying on their individuality and diversity, whereas the American Industry has an hierarchical structure which is audience driven and reliant on genre and is more 'aggressively commercial'. This definition of 'industry' and the recognition of Irish film production being separate from it is an interesting point and encourages Irish film to be discussed in terms of its cultural context. The language associated with an industry tends to subordinate terms of 'culture' in reference to film. This was a criticism levelled at the Scottish Film Council (SFC) and the Scottish Film Production Fund (SFPF) (now Scottish Screen Agency) by Colin McArthur claiming that their failure to articulate a meaningful production policy lay with their surrender to an industrial model rather than posing the question in terms of a cultural need (McARTHUR, Colin, 1993, pg 31.) This is a comparable situation to Irish film production. The larger budget films in the last number of years have received funding from outside Ireland and with it a responsibility to an international audience thereby as McArthur suggests binding them in a regressive discourse on their own culture. The proposal to this is the development of a 'poor cinema', in the case of Scotland and Ireland, a 'poor Celtic cinema'. This would change the funding provided by the Irish Film Board by lowering budgets of films, thereby allowing more films to be funded. This would fit in with the Irish Film Board's aims of creating a diverse, innovative basis of films in Ireland and echoes the views of Ed Guiney in reference to encouraging Irish filmmakers. Opponents to an emergence of a 'poor Cinema' argue that lower budgets would restrict aesthetic forms yet it can be seen from films such as 'Ailsa' that this is not the case. The awarding of innovation as opposed to commercial viability is how



the Irish Film Board can create an environment in which more filmmakers in Ireland are broadening the field of film production. With smaller budget films, there is not the pressure of making a commercial success, there is less interference and more opportunity for film talent to emerge. With more film production occurring a development of Irish cinema can take place. This is how the Irish Film Board can aid the positive discourse of Irish Cinema and encourage the diversity and innovation it speaks of. As quoted in its own 1995/6 Annual Report, "We can say, with Heraclitus, that change is the only constant." This change needs to be followed through with a commitment to its associated requirements. The development of a new attitude to film needs a concerted effort in promoting the right scripts and filmmakers to carry it through. To this end the Film Board must have a direction and desire to encourage new production. This direction must also be aware of the inevitable, not every film will be important and/or successful. The production of an Irish film should receive its due critical analysis and not be viewed as a novelty for its Irishness. For a maturing film production environment to be realised, a maturing attitude to the films produced must be apparent. Increasing the opportunity to view Irish films would aid this ability to discuss them in relation to an overall Irish cinema. This should be done through the development of Arthouse cinemas, particularly in Dublin to run in parallel to the Irish Film Centre. The development of such cinemas could be accounted for by the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht in its initial development with the intention of it being capable of running on a commercial basis such as the Kino in Cork. The need for Irish films to be seen is obvious and an increase in exhibition venues which are separate from the mainstream theatres would benefit Irish filmmakers. Such a development needs encouragement in financial terms and should be a consideration for Government assistance.

The realignment of the aims of film production in Ireland should be the main occupation for those involved in shaping the Irish film production environment ie. Minister for The Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, Síle de Valera, and the Irish Film Board.

This identification of a need to re-assess the direction of film production in the Republic of Ireland provides the point of

departure for a comparative analysis with Northern Ireland. The situations which each region face are markedly different. Northern Ireland has the opportunity to avail of its situation within the United Kingdom while maintaining a relative independence of culture and identity. This similarity to Scotland, reflected in the Northern Ireland Film Commission infrastructure, allows Northern Ireland the benefits of a new Labour Government with its own individual region to promote. This promotion is the main aim of the Commission at present and until a sufficient number of productions are consistently being produced in Northern Ireland it will remain the main objective. What the Northern Ireland Film Commission can benefit from are the lessons to be learned from the history of film production in the Republic of Ireland. The structures are in place through which film production in Northern Ireland can develop its filmmakers. The one umbrella organisation, The Northern Ireland Film Commission, set up to deal with all aspects of film production in Northern Ireland can aid growth from base level. This has the potential to accelerate the development of filmmaking in Northern Ireland. The success of productions early on for the Commission could provide a platform from which this growth could be a telling indicator for the future of film production in Northern Ireland.

The recurring theme in the history of film production in Ireland is the perceived need to push the process of developing a solid system of production further on sooner than it is ready to go. The eagerness to embrace an industrial method of development without the appropriate basis in place has been, and still is, a problem. This was apparent in the arguments which were exchanged between the Association of Independent Producers Ireland (AIPI) and the National Film Studios Ireland (NFSI). The Studios were incapable of making a positive contribution to the development of an Irish technical workforce due to the lack of consideration for training and employment. The appropriation of monies to the studios as opposed to producers became a problem due to the lack of a structure which could take responsibility for such matters. With the establishment of the Film Board Mark1 such a structure was put in place for the producers yet it was wound down due to its financial status. This is indicative of the attitude of Fianna Fáil Government attempting to pre-empt a self reliant film industry. This



led to the initial provision for tax relief through Section 35 but it wasn't until a motivated Labour <sup>Cosgrave</sup> Government gained control of the Arts that this amended system began to work due to the relaunching of the Irish Film Board. It is obvious that film production in Ireland needs this State subvention and motivation to succeed. For this reason the full 100% status of Section 35 investment for businesses should be reinstated. Film production in Ireland needs to maintain a mixture of sources of funding to develop films. These sources, Section 35 investment, Irish Film Board funds, European funding, need to be available to producers enabling them to find further private investment and Marketing and Distribution possibilities. This combination of elements coupled with a conscious effort on the part of the Irish Film Board to encourage more lower budget films will create a more appropriate situation in which Irish filmmakers will benefit. The need for an environment in which innovative filmmaking is made more accessible is evident. The conspicuous lack of experimental filmmaking in Ireland should be addressed. The development of a low budget cinema, 'a poor cinema', would provide the opportunity for such a development. Film production in Ireland needs to find its own identity and expression before it can expect to influence reflected perceptions of its own culture. To do this it must concentrate the efforts of its filmmakers on the development of a film culture which is relative to its capabilities instead of becoming fixated with the terminology of an industry which does not exist.





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**Paddy Breathnach** - Treasure Films, director of 'Ailsa', 'I Went Down', interviewed by the author, October 15th 1997

HAVE YOU MADE THE DECISION NOW THAT IT IS THE CREATIVE SIDE NOT THE COMMERCIAL SIDE THAT TREASURE FILMS IS ABOUT?

Ultimately it's the balance you try and make; when you're making a film, no matter what, you have to engage in the commercial realities of that film whether, that is, you're going to make a film that is completely funded by subvention well that is the commercial reality. In other words you have to orientate yourself toward your client or your market which is the agency which gives subvention, so whatever way you're always engaged in that balance. I think what we would say is that we are in this business because we want to make films and in doing that you try to find your niche, the audience that you're trying to address, and the level at which you begin to get involved with other agencies and other people have an influence on what you do. I've never really seen it as a division between creativity and a commercial way, particularly with a popular art it's very hard to divorce the two.

WOULD YOU HAVE AN EMPHASIS ON FEATURE FILM PRODUCTION AS OPPOSED TO YOUR DOCUMENTARY OR DO YOU SEE THE TWO AS HAND IN HAND?

My priority would definitely be with feature film but obviously documentary would be something I would be very keen on because I enjoy doing it, it's a very creative thing I wouldn't see it as being an inferior thing to the feature film side of the work. I'd love to do a big feature documentary about the life of a village, a year portrait of a village, that would be something I would have thought about for a long time, it might be difficult to get money for a project like that so I probably won't do it for a

while, but I wouldn't necessarily draw a hard line between them (feature,documentary). Features are definitely the priority but I wouldn't want them to diminish the other side.

WOULD A THREAD BETWEEN YOUR DOCUMENTARIES AND THE FEATURES BE THE ATTITUDE, EXPRESSED IN INTERVIEW (PAUL POWER, ISSUE 30, PG. 17) THAT IN "I WENT DOWN" YOU WANTED TO CREATE " ...A FILM THAT WAS GOING TO BE SEEN WIDELY BY AN IRISH AUDIENCE IN MULTIPLEXES AND RIGHT ACROSS THE COUNTRY. I WANTED THE FILM TO CAPTURE THEIR IMAGINATION AND WANTED THEM TO TAKE THE FILM OUT OF THE CINEMA, COPY SOME OF THE LINES, IMITATE THE GAGS, ENJOY AND REVEL IN THE CHARACTERS, AND HOPE THAT THOSE CHARACTERS WOULD GO INTO AND EXPAND THE PANOPLY OF IRISH TYPES THAT ARE SEEN IN MOVIES. WE WANTED MORE THAN ANYTHING TO ENGAGE WITH AN AUDIENCE AND I THINK THAT WAS THE CORE STARTING POINT." THIS ATTITUDE WOULD FIT WITH THE DOCUMENTARY OF "THE ROAD TO AMERICA" IN ITS ABILITY TO CATCH THE PUBLIC'S IMAGINATION.

I think so ....I mean I made Ailsa which is very much an arthouse film and a lot of the films I like myself are quite esoteric like ... Angelopilus who makes like four hour films which would bore the pants of most people and there are things in them which I think are fantastic and I have huge regard for but I think as well as that I have always felt a strain. And I know Robert (Walpole) has a regard for a popular medium, that engagement and keeping an eye on making something that captures a popular imagination. It's not something that is an article of faith or anything, it's just something that you feel or that you are orientated towards. There would be two motivations, one being the popular theme and the other to develop and refine craft and develop the art of what you are doing, in the future I might go in one direction and in another film I might go in the other. I might make something that is not a completely popular film but something which addresses a specific audience in a very definite way but for a number of reasons I am going to continue to make things which have a popular appeal.

CAN YOU SEE NOW WITH THE SUCCESS IN IRELAND OF "I WENT DOWN" A KICK START EFFECT TO AN IRISH FILM INDUSTRY.

I think there has been already. I don't think any industry is going to live on one film. There has been a gradual progression, 'Korea', 'Guiltrip' then maybe some short films which didn't have much economic impact but definitely had an impact in terms of stretching the boundaries of the kinds of films that people were trying to make, Stephen Burke's films and then in an other direction Kevin Liddy's stuff .All those things would have marked out territory for people so that they say we're not all making the same stuff, we will develop our own individual voices. That's what the film industry needs, it needs a range of different voices within that. My next film mightn't come out for the next year and a half or two years, you can't build a domestic industry on that, you need, four, five, six people making films on a regular basis, some of them are going to be good, some are going to be hit and miss, that's the nature of it. So to see the success, here, of 'I Went Down' as being a kick-start, I would say it's more evidence of the growth that has been happening, and it's an ongoing thing. Let's remember that "Last of the High Kings" came out and had quite a good release here as well and also "Some Mothers Son." They had domestic releases before anywhere else and they began to stretch the possibility that there is a commercial market in Ireland and that you can accept that. So just to tie that up I think it might make distributors forge a little bit more of a connection between distributors and producers here, so let's say it is definitely a good development and will make people see the possibilities of either bettering that or at least trying to achieve that at a level that is possible, but I still think there needs to be more volume of material coming through.



WOULD 'I WENT DOWN' NOT BE CONSIDERED A MORE CONTEMPORARY FILM IN REFERENCE TO 'LAST OF THE HIGH KINGS' WHICH WAS QUITE NOSTALGIC FOR A SPECIFIC TIME IN IRELAND AND 'SOME MOTHERS SON' DEALS WITH THE NORTHERN IRELAND 'TROUBLES' YET 'I WENT DOWN' DOESN'T ADDRESS ANY OF THE TRADITIONAL THEMES IN IRISH CINEMA, PRESUMABLY THIS WAS A CONSCIOUS DECISION.

I think with 'Last of the High Kings' people missed out on it being a teen movie, and there hadn't been a teen movie and to that extent it is a very contemporary movie because it earmarked or targeted its' audience and what was interesting about that was that the Irish reviewers gave it a kick in the pants but in the U.K (I particularly remember seeing that Moviewatch programme) they gave a very good response and the reason why is that was the target audience, and the people behind making that were trying to make a film which was engaging for a contemporary film market so they could fit into that slot. So I think that was quite a healthy thing and I'm glad that it did reasonably well at the box office here because it gives an indication that there is a teen market here as opposed to making a film that supposedly every Irish person would want to see. I think the same is true of 'Some Mothers Son'. It has a particular voice and I think it is addressing a particular age group and that person's experience. I have to say that experience was not my experience and I suppose what I wanted to do was to make a film that addressed an Irish audience on the same terms as the films they are seeing all the time.

WAS THAT THE REASON FOR BRINGING THE GENRE FEEL OF THE ROAD MOVIE/BUDDY MOVIE?

We definitely wanted to make a genre movie because that is a commercial movie, for all intents and purposes that is the language of commercial cinema. Within that I think it partially developed from the ideas that we were throwing around but I wouldn't say we were coldly saying we want to make a specific genre. Initially we were talking within a gangster realm. I think it probably came out of the coalition of Irish Mythology and how to

transpose that into a contemporary world, that was the original idea as a starting point, a discussion point. I think we were reacting to certain things that were happening in world cinema as well so in making a gangster movie we decided not to make a neighbourhood movie or a tough guys movie because there have been so many films made like that already.

WAS THAT THE IDEA OF A JOURNEY THAT YOU WANTED TO INCLUDE?

I wanted a quest and the first draft was really establishing characters and then I asked Conor (Conor McPherson) if he would broaden it out, make it more of a journey and get them to leave their world and he interpreted that as moving from the north of Dublin to maybe a more middle class part of the south of Dublin. I kind of meant a broader land journey as a quest and in the development the buddy aspect was something that we started to concentrate on a bit more, that was working and we were just enjoying doing that.

Just to get back to the original thing of avoiding things. I wouldn't want it to come across as a negative intention and that wasn't really our intention, in making the film we didn't want to tell the story in a way that was a little bit dull or clichéd that we'd seen it a million times before. We ourselves didn't enjoy seeing those sorts of things so why should we put them in our own film? There were things that were relevant to our experience. There are things that maybe you need to have an experience of. It is not that you have to make a film of just your own experience because obviously none of us were born into the gangster world but we do have an experience of that in terms of film and also in terms of contemporary Irish reality and the way it's recorded in newspapers. It was a bit of a reaction to the stories of the criminals and that Dublin wasn't safe and yet at the same time Government enquiries were saying that crime was going down, we were trying to maybe make that whole horrible world a little more palatable by making it funny, having a bit of fun with it.



AND THEN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DUBLIN AND CORK WASN'T OVER EMPHASISED OR DELAYED UPON, THE CHANGE WAS ASSUMED..

The interest in Mythology and the gangster world was there, if you read a myth about ancient kingdoms this guy goes from one ancient kingdom to another to retrieve something, in a contemporary world it's very hard to imagine that except if it is territory controlled in a criminal way. That is why we portrayed Cork in that way, and it was humorous in a way to portray this shadowy Cork gangsterland that we aren't too explicit about. I think as well that you have to make it slightly more graphic let's say, the journey to Cork is not a large distance but we had to make it more graphic to give a sense that it really was a journey for them. That was done through the landscape we showed also with the captions rather than professing that they're arriving at a big city with a city sign 'CORK' because unfortunately the reality in Ireland is that you're not aware of those great shifts when you move, you're not changing climate I mean if you go from Georgia to Mississippi you've already changed climate, unfortunately we don't have that range in Ireland so we have to give the impression of that.

THE LANDSCAPES WERE VERY SPARSE AND OPEN....

We didn't want to enclose them too much, the dilemma encloses them but we wanted the landscape to diminish that, we wanted it to be starker and more graphic with them and their situation. I think as well visually it was more dramatic and more interesting in the simple way that it gave people a different view of things. I would have to say that it has been talked about and a lot has been written about it but it's not rocket science or anything, anyone who goes out of Dublin will know that there are a lot of different landscapes in Ireland and there is the potential for lots of interesting locations for films and maybe structure in an industry could encourage that. It is easier to say, that is a pretty field, but pretty.. what is beautiful or what has beauty in it or what



can you conjure beauty out of is very different to pretty, you need things like photography and advertising and loads of different things to scupper those views years ago and in some ways we're only really catching up with things that people have been doing for a long long time

DO YOU SEE OTHER FILMMAKERS IN IRELAND TRYING TO PUSH THAT FORWARD AS WELL, CAN YOU ENVISAGE A MORE INVENTIVE APPROACH TO IRISH FILM SIMILAR TO THAT IN AMERICA SUCH AS THE COEN BROTHERS?

The thing in Ireland is that we don't have a real paradigm. They are reacting to the paradigms that are part of their country; we have a funny thing where we're reacting against paradigms of the cinema also a small range of paradigms in Irish life so we're not operating out of the same palette with the same range of things so I don't think we have the freedom to react as much as maybe they do. I think in a way for us there is a limited range of things that we can deal with, probably where we can draw most from is character and that is maybe more interesting in a way.

THAT WOULD BE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHARACTER BUNNY AND THE EVENTUAL CHANGE OF THE HARD NOSED CRIMINAL TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS HOMOSEXUAL EXPERIENCE.....

He had a secret and he'd been building up to this secret ... there is a huge energy about Bunnys' character and a demonstrative nature which comes from the fact that he is trying to express something which he can't fully understand. He comes from a world where he has been given a set of values and anything outside of that he finds very hard to accept even if it is a reality and basically something happens to him in prison but he finds himself unable to express what that is and that frustration makes him demonstrative but he is always trying to come to terms with it and trying to say something that he can't fully comprehend, and this humourous element makes it very funny. I think that is at the core of the character, what is good about that as well is that as

well is it makes him very vulnerable; at that point he has told something that is completely taboo in his world and he has told it to another man. It creates a certain low level tension.

THAT WAS THE LINK FOR THE AUDIENCE, TO BE LET INTO THE CHARACTER OF BUNNY, ALONG WITH THE SUBSEQUENT SCENE IN THE TOILETS WHEN THE TWO ARE JOKING WITH EACH OTHER.

He is being a boy then, before we had that information we would have taken him as being macho and when we have the information it is different. The way I saw it when talking with Brendan about is he gay; my response was that I don't think you need to define it at this stage, it is something that he can't understand so why should we try to explain it? What it is is that he was in prison and the circumstance was that he needed a tenderness or an involvement with somebody at that time, what happened after that I don't know.

THAT WAS DEMONSTRATED WHEN HE DECLARES "I'M NOT QUEER OR ANYTHING", AND SO IT'S LEFT OPEN AT THE END WHEN THE TWO HEAD OFF FOR THE STATES, ACTUALLY BRENDAN GLEESON SAID THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE HOW THE TWO GET ON IN THE STATES, IS THAT A CONSIDERATION?

We have been talking about it, if the film did well in the States maybe we could do it, maybe we should think about doing it anyway. We've had ideas like Bunny starts up a hot dog stand and he gets into some trouble and they come out of retirement to sort it out, but I don't know what will happen. I think they're great characters and I'd love to do something with them, but I think the thing for us is that you want to do something new and something fresh.



IF THERE WAS A LARGE SUCCESS WITH THE FILM IN THE STATES CAN YOU SEE THAT TREASURE WOULD STILL OPERATE FROM IRELAND?

I think we will always operate from Ireland because that is where you want to live and work. It comes down to very a basic thing of what you want to do with your life, what makes you happy, we've already decided our next film with Conor. It is set in the states in-Alabama and we don't know if that is going to be funded by the states or by Europe. It may go either way. The reason for doing that ,if you want to break it down, is that we wanted to do something fresh and different with a new landscape, something we could explore. We had an idea years ago and we talked to Conor about it and he developed 'Macintyre' out of that and that is something that is a challenge. It wouldn't necessarily mean that the next one would be in the states.

HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT THE TASK OF FINANCING THE FILMS?

Normally what would happen would be you would try and get some development money together to pay the writer to write the script and pay some overheads and maybe pay for someone to go to Cannes to pitch the script. We got very little development money actually but eventually we got some and we had a very good script and we didn't have to trawl around too much, people liked it quite quickly so the reaction from financiers was quite prompt. The two main sources of finance were the Irish Film Board and BBC Films. We knew both of them liked the script. Then I had to meet BBC Films because I was the director and they had to see if they liked me and if I was going to make a good job of it, and I got on well with them. Then we knew that they would give us between £700 000 and £900 000 towards the film. That comes in a couple of ways BBC money comes via the TV license so they pay for the right to show the film exclusively in the UK for a certain period of time and they would pay something like £450 000 for that right. Then the rest of it is an outputting payment. To get into detail, Deep Sea Films would have payed about £300 000 and then we got some



from Deep Sea Worldwide which brought us up to roughly £900 000. The Film Board came in with something like £350 000, we would have applied to them they would have agreed to finance us and then we would have negotiated the level that they were going to give us. That is read as a Board and they make a decision as a Board. Then we got Section 35 which works more as a mechanism, it's not about the quality of the script, it's about how much money you're going to spend in Ireland and you basically get a set percentage, between 12 & 15% of the budget.

SO WITH SECTION 35 MONEY THERE IS NO ONE OVER SEEING THE PROJECT, IT IS AN AUTOMATED PROCESS OF SORTS?

It is almost an automated thing yes, you have to go through bureaucratic hoops but it's more or less a financial mechanism. If you were getting an enhanced Section 35 deal, where they're putting in very hard equity then they may well want to have a say about it, but in our instance they didn't.

THEN THAT IS THE INFLUENCE OF MICHAEL D HIGGINS?

Michael D's department would give you a certificate and that means that this is an Irish Film; that it has got enough Irish talent or there is enough money being spent in Ireland and they certify that and it has to get that cert. in order to qualify for Section 35. Section 35 operates on a basis where investors are getting a tax break for their investment.

AND DOES THE SYSTEM WORK FOR INVESTORS?

It can operate well. If someone came to me and said I'm thinking of investing in your film, can you guarantee me that my investment will be okay I can honestly say yes. The people that were stung, were stung because they didn't exercise the controls that are available to them. There are risks but there are mechanisms to control them.

## IS THERE A CONFIDENCE IN INVESTMENT AT THE MOMENT?

If I make a good film then it does make it easier to attract investment but I don't think we have reached the stage yet where people can feel completely confident in investment.

## SO THEN WOULD THAT POINT TO THE NOTION THAT THERE IS AN ELITE WHO ARE RECEIVING THE BENEFITS?

I wouldn't say that there is an elitism, anybody can get Section 35 money. I think there is a difference if a private investor is going to put money into a film on a risk basis then they are not going to invest money if they don't think that they have a good chance of getting that money back and there are a number of things involved in that, like the director, the track record of the production company, the kind of people that you might be thinking of casting in the film. They would want security in all of those areas. Anyone can operate Section 35, it is a mechanism, there is an elitism in the sense that you need to know how to operate within it but everyone working within that mechanism didn't know how to operate it 4 or 5 years ago. In terms of the Film Board I think that it is inevitable that there are going to be a lot of people turned down by the Board. Obviously they are going to favour those with a track record. They have experience at varying degrees but consistently there are going to be people who are going to be making that first fair short film and they are going to get funding from that. So I wouldn't say that there is an elite but I have to say that access to it isn't particularly easy either. It is the nature of the business. If someone says to me how do you get into it, to be a film director or producer, it's about ideas. It's like someone who is a novelist and it's very hard to say that being a novelist is being elite based on what it is you produce to make people believe that you are capable of being that thing.



DO YOU THINK THAT THE FILM BOARD SETUP AT THE MOMENT IS CONDUCTIVE TO NEW FILM-MAKERS?

I think they are. At the initial stage I think nearly everyone was a new filmmaker and I think they have to consolidate that a little and allow some sort of nucleus of talent to establish itself because otherwise the thing will dissipate completely, they have to have some kind of bedrock of talent that they can guarantee a number of films that will feed back money towards them as well. I think that probably it will tighten up to a certain extent although I think they may have more money but I think there is a always filter through of new people; that's in their ethos and that's in the way they talk all the time.

AND THE CHANGES ON THE BOARD RECENTLY, NEIL JORDAN STEPPING DOWN AND GABRIEL BYRNE STEPPING IN DO YOU THINK THAT IS A BENEFICIAL CHANGE?

I think it is. The only thing I would say is that there is nobody really there to reflect the kind of people that they are funding. There is no domestic producer or director who has been developing feature projects in Ireland. Gabriel Byrne has been doing that but mainly from the States, he would have a different experience. Morgan O'Sullivan to a certain extent but he has been mainly in the States as well but it's very hard to find someone. It's like going out and getting a football team, everyone wants to play but who's going to be the referee. It's a small quibble maybe, they've been very good so far. It's a difficult thing, increasingly people are going to be disappointed because there are more people coming into it. I mean I get scripts in occasionally that need funding or maybe some of them have got some funding but will be refused production money, and some of it is awful, and it's a cruel thing because people work quite hard on a script and they think that part of them is in that script and that they should get money for it, but why should they? There is no reason why anyone should automatically get money to say what they want to say. The only way they should get money is if that person has a proven talent. Is



there something in their writing which is so excellent and undeniably good or that it has a commercial reality? It is a very difficult thing.

IS TREASURE FILMS JUST YOURSELF AND ROBERT MALPOLE OR ARE THERE MORE INVOLVED BECAUSE YOU HAVE WORKED WITH A NUMBER OF THE SAME PEOPLE?

Treasure is myself and Robert and we have two other people working there now. On a project by project basis Emer Reynolds and Cian de Buitlear (cameraman) would be people who I have worked with on a fairly consistent basis. Some of the other people I have worked with at different levels, also Conor McPherson and soon with Joseph O'Connor on 'Cowboys and Indians'. You try to establish relationships because, number one, you want to work with people you enjoy working with and also that there is a degree of trust and you have established that level. I think the other side of it is the balance between sticking with a team and developing relationships and allowing people to grow within that but also making sure that you're always working with new people because it's exciting to work with someone who's new and coming in and challenging you and bringing something fresh to the pot. Loyalty is a great thing but I think that you have to temper it with trying to develop and expand. For example, one editor or cameraman might be good for one job, maybe they aren't the best for some other jobs.

IS THAT PART OF THE ATTRACTION OF THE NEW MACINTYRE PROJECT, TAKING IT TO AMERICA?

Yes, I mean I might take some of the crew to America as well and work over there with them. That might be part of the way of expanding their talents and your own talents and also maybe giving us a special look to the thing but at the same time I would be conscious that there are a lot of great people over there and things that I love watching and you kind of say well it would be nice to be working with some of those people.

WHO WOULD BE YOUR CONTEMPORARIES IN DUBLIN AT THE MOMENT?

Temple Films, Ed Guiney and Stephen Bradley. They are going into pre production on a film which Steven Bradley is directing. There is Parallel Films, Alan Maloney, David Collins, Samson Films and obviously Cathal Black.

AND IS THERE A GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT FILM-MAKERS?

We share information, it's a small place so there are degrees with which you have to maintain your own identity but at the same time we would share a lot of information. We would ask questions of them and get questioned in return so it's quite a healthy thing.

DO YOU HAVE MUCH CONTACT WITH THE NORTHERN IRELAND FILM PRODUCTION?

Not really at all. We should develop it a lot more but not so far ourselves. At the moment I'd imagine that if they would want to be involved in something we were shooting in the North but none of the projects initially are orientated towards that. It is really part of subvention that when you get money you gear yourself toward shooting something in that particular region, but we should because there is money there.

'I WENT DOWN' DOES NOT ADDRESS ISSUES TRADITIONALLY ASSOCIATED WITH IRISH CINEMA. IS THAT SOMETHING THAT YOU INTEND TO FOLLOW ON WITH?

I think the film is a very Irish film but I don't think that it engages with an idea of trying to define Irishness. Just the way people speak, the landscapes everything identifies it but it is not a debate that it is trying to engage in. You find that is happening more and more. It happened in the rock industry ages ago. I think that it is happening more and more that people are just doing things. People say that "I'm sick and tired of seeing films set in



Ireland in the 1950s about the land" or something like that, or "I'm sick and tired of hearing the uilleann pipes on a film," but actually if I can make a good film set in the 1950s about those issues, about the people's lives and use those as a metaphor to tell other stories so be it, I mean I'd love to make a 'Jean de Florette' in Ireland, to get a big rural epic would be brilliant and if I used Irish music as part of the score for that, again so be it. I would want to use it in a way that film score works not in a way that I am imposing something to give a very thin layer of meaning. I'd want the music to give a real depth to the meaning but I think there is a confusion between types of films and types of application of Irish resources that are in Irish films that have been done badly, and the idea that there is something that isn't invalid in doing that in the first place at all. So in making something that is contemporary I wouldn't want to project the idea that making something to do with the past is invalid. I'd love to do a civil war movie. If I did it might be with a certain spin. I'd love to do something like 'The Name of the Rose' set in Ireland 2000 years ago about a family who are writing the manuscript of the Irish Karma Sutra, the Irish history of sexual law, and a foreign oppressive force comes into the country and tries to suppress that knowledge and it becomes a thriller about the guy who lost the law and it's gone forever. It's kind of a slight joke about explaining why there is no sexual history in Ireland but there are so many ways that you can approach our past with a contemporary point of view that just the simple thing of trying to shun the past is not enough. It is better to not be trapped by it and create paradigms from 20 or 30 years ago completely dictating what your view of that would be. It's a very unhealthy thing to have. A lot of people have tried to escape from that and think they have come back and tried to address that.



**Frankie McCafferty** - director of 'Brood' **Ian Kilroy** - Writer of 'Brood' in interview November 1997 in the Irish Film Centre.

THE FILM HAD A REAL MOOD ABOUT IT AND A RHYTHM THAT BROUGHT THE VIEWER THROUGH IT, THAT WAS SOMETHING YOU OBVIOUSLY CONSIDERED.

We actually cut the poem because there's almost that length again, it was written four years ago and there were bits that didn't suit going on to the screen and bits that weren't developed enough, it also had some lighter moments between the husband and wife but we decided it's called 'Brood' and for the audio/visual thing it had to stick to the point and we just went for that. The other considerations were the way that the cameraman shot it, the music and the editing. The post production took much longer than the actual shoot. The shoot took ten days and we gathered home movie footage over maybe a couple of years, the post production lasted maybe three or four months, we took it really slowly, it's not like cutting a regular film; this is the first scene, this is the second- due to the narration.

AND THE FILM NOW HAS BEEN SHOWN IN THE GALWAY FESTIVAL?

It was in the festival; it was second in the first short category I think it was and it was on in Cork. That's a much bigger festival for shorts, there's something like 850 submissions and they only show something like 120 so it's very hard to get picked. It is very hard also to push a film like this because it is so different, it's very hard to categorise, it's not going to get an award in Cork because the other films are very slick and well made. They're straight dramas and take time to tell one story. 'Brood' is the sort of film you need to watch twice. You would almost need to read it before you watch it but I really wanted to direct it, I'm an actor anyway, I've appeared in about 15 or 16 feature films so it would

have been very easy to do something along the lines of what I do anyway but I can make a better mark as a first time director doing something a bit chancy and a bit risky and also to be honest a lot of the films I have been in, without wanting to sound ungrateful have been bad films. Not all of them Film Board-funded, the money would have come from America through to the new genre here which is IRA films and they're just not very good first of all. They are not very good films, they're not well written dramas, and they're not lucidly typified too much. What I liked about 'Brood' is the whole thing is there in all its complication without anybody coming to any clear conclusion other than they are broken hearted over ..everything. It's like getting a heavy book to read or a complicated book. In Ireland the idea of the epic has been oversimplified too much. I think it has been very unfair the way the 'Troubles' have been treated in film. I think they have been crass about it, taking advantage of the situation for what are fairly bad films.

DO YOU THINK THAT AMONG FILMMAKERS THERE IS AN INCREASING MOVE TOWARD A REINVENTION OF A NATIONAL IDENTITY?

I don't think you could call it a movement. I don't think that there is that agenda when someone goes to write a film. They write about what is interesting to them and I don't think that you can have such a thing as a national cinema because that takes on a blind conformity.

DO YOU THINK THAT THERE IS A GROWTH IN IRISH CINEMA AND AN INCREASED CONFIDENCE IN FILMMAKERS?

Yes, I think it is learning the genre. There haven't actually been that many films made in Ireland over the last twenty or thirty years, and now there is a demand for audiovisual work there are films being shot all over Ireland now. It's more accepted now as a product, it doesn't have to be a film with a mission, generally we're doing better. I think 'I Went Down' is a good example, it isn't



dumbed down, I think it is a very intelligent film and it's a genre movie, a road movie as well as having a serious tone to it as well. Sociologically it is very true, it's right on the button as to where Ireland is now.

SO TALKING ABOUT A MOVE ON IN FILM-MAKING, DO YOU INTEND TO CONCENTRATE ON DIRECTING AS OPPOSED TO ACTING?

As an actor I certainly can't complain, I've been working away for ten years. I'm lucky enough to have got a good education in UCD, I got a scholarship to study drama in France, I've probably got a little bit more training than I need to be an actor and I sort of feel honour or duty bound to do something else: not a move on to stop acting but something more. I'm a character actor so I get some nice little roles in films but I've never had to carry a film as an actor, I'd love the chance to but I appreciate that people look at me when they're casting and see me in a certain role.

MY FIRST FILM WAS WITH JOE WALL WHICH WAS A COMPLETE THROWAWAY PIECE OF MAYHEM CALLED 'THE BIRTH OF FRANK POP' WE JUST DID IT FOR THE CRAIC, AS A KIND OF DARE OR A JOKE AND IT TOOK US A YEAR TO FINISH IT AND WE FOUND IT VERY HARD GOING. THAT WAS COMPLETELY OFF OUR OWN BAT WITH OUR OWN MONEY WHICH WE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE. JOE (WALL-THE STUNNING) DID THE SOUNDTRACK FOR 'BROOD', I HOPE HE GOES BACK TO DIRECTING, HE DIRECTED '..FRANK POP' AND WE PRODUCED IT TOGETHER. IT WAS A DIFFICULT PROJECT TO GET GOING BECAUSE WE WEREN'T FUNDED AND BECAUSE WE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WE WERE DOING, GETTING INTO IT BUT I THINK WE DID THE RIGHT THING. WE HAD A MAD IDEA FOR A FILM AND NO ONE WAS GOING TO FUND US SO WE SHOT IT ON SUPER 8, I WAS WORKING WITH DRUID THEATRE GROUP AND JOE WAS WITH THE STUNNING SO ANYTIME WE WERE AWAY WE TOOK THE SUPER 8. WE SHOT IN PARIS AND TORONTO AND IN SYDNEY, WHEREVER ANY ONE WAS GOING THEY JUST THREW THE COSTUME IN THE BAG.

*not ccps*

DO YOU THINK THAT THERE IS ENOUGH CHANCE FOR NEW FILMMAKERS TO START OFF?

Yes, I think so, I mean I've only directed one film, I've been in a few and I know that there's maybe more politics than I'm aware of but I wouldn't be able to complain. It took us a long time to get 'Brood' shot but that didn't surprise me, you have to be



realistic about it, you can't have the idea one night and shoot it the next day. The production companies that are around, I know Treasure films and Temple films quite well and they are both good about supporting things like this, they're watching what's going on. So even making a three minute piece of mayhem is a step up, once you have anything shot it gets easier. Unfortunately you can't get money until you have something to show, but there is a big case for making something off your own steam, with your friends. When we took 'Frank Pop' around the festivals we went to Hamburg which is a short film festival and we saw some incredible stuff which had obviously had nothing spent on it, we were in a low/no budget round where you had to say what the budget was in your blurb in the film, there were films made for twelve quid, twenty five quid and some of them were great.

(Ian Kilroy joins)

PRESUMABLY THAT KIND OF BUDGET RELIES ON A LOT OF FAVOURS?

Because on '..Frank Pop' we had no money everything was a favour and it's not that people let you down but it's just that you feel bad about taking advantage of them so on 'Brood' there was a budget for everything quite carefully, but I think we did it quite successfully. Everybody was paid.

SO WHEN THE POEM WAS BEING PUT INTO FILM WAS THERE MUCH THAT HAD TO BE CHANGED OR DROPPED DUE TO THE BUDGET?

That didn't really arise with money but in what would work and what wouldn't work on screen. The one constraint that we had was that I thought 'Brood' could make an hour long thing but then that's a long time to hear words coming at you and everyone agreed that it would be better at a half hour. We weren't stuck for stuff though, we made a pilot and it happened fairly organically from there. I don't think there were any arguments about what got cut and what didn't. Money wasn't a problem really, it was managed well. There's a lot of Super 8 in the film as well which



was shot previously in New York so that helped. Then the ten days that we did in Galway was just the characters and that was around half of what you see.

DO YOU SEE THAT THERE IS ENOUGH GOOD WORK BEING WRITTEN IN IRELAND AT THE MOMENT FOR FILM?

Ian: I think that the writing is maturing in that it's less self conscious,

Frank: it's less tortured,

Ian: it's less Irish.

HOW WAS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FILM BOARD AS FILM-MAKERS?

Our dealings with Rod Stoneman were very good he came in and was helpful when he turned up but he didn't sit on us. I gather he's very pleased with 'Brood' and it's the sort of film that I think wouldn't have been made without the film board, it wouldn't be a commercial film but still I believe it deserved to get made and he seemed to think so almost from the beginning as well.

DO YOU THINK THERE IS A DANGER WITH A FILM BOARD TO OVERLY AFFECT THE TYPE OF FILMS MADE?

Frank: No I don't think so.

Ian: Possibly in the 'Shortcuts' there could be that problem

Frank: There are some great films showing in Cork but I don't think that they're proper shorts they're almost like showreels for people who want to make features, they're really slick and really good. They need to use their money a bit more imaginatively, some of the shorts are like trailers for the feature. Then saying that there are some wonderfully self contained shorts there as well.

Ian: 'Brood' doesn't really fall into the same category as shorts which is why it's hard to get it shown without being in the midst of a lot of shorts where it doesn't really fit. It's then being read in



a bad context. 'Brood' has the logic of a poem and in the way an image in a poem disappears and goes underground and it comes back developed in a different way later on. That's the way the film works logically - it has its own logic, it hasn't got that narrative logic which a short has. Then if you're going to watch it with shorts you're not really going to know what to do with it.

IS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU THAT THE FILM GETS TAKEN ON BY SOME DISTRIBUTION PROCESS?

It's important that it gets seen.... If it payed off its cost then that would be great, but the main thing is that people see it.

SO THEN THE IRISH FILM BOARD HAVEN'T BEEN LOOKING FOR A RETURN?

No they haven't been like that at all.

Ian: We met Rod Stoneman twice, once when he told us that the board were going to support the project and to say what do you think about this and that, not what I think you should do is.. , just to challenge your own preconceptions about the film which was good because that is what we needed at the time. Then he sat in on the cut and was very positive and asked if we had considered other angles and was happy to leave it up to us. His job was to that it was being made as we wanted it to be made.

DID YOU QUALIFY FOR MONEY THROUGH SECTION 35?

No we didn't qualify, it was only a small budget of £46 000 but we did get investors.

SO WHAT'S NEXT?

I'm trying to write a screenplay for Treasure Films.

**Enda Hughes** - director of 'The Eliminator' and 'Flying Saucer Rock'n'Roll in interview Tuesday 9th December 1997, Irish Film Centre

THE ELIMINATOR' WAS MADE WITHOUT THE INITIAL BENEFIT OF SUBVENTION NOW AFTER IT'S RELEASE AND YOU HAVING WORKED ON OTHER PROJECTS HAS YOUR SITUATION REGARDING FUNDING CHANGED?

It has changed a bit alright. The last film we did was a 10 minute short called 'Flying Saucer Rock'n'Roll' it's just finished in October and it was made under a scheme quite like Shortcuts or Northern Lights. It was a group of people, the Northern Ireland Film Commission, UTV who gave money for the first time, Belfast City Council and British Screen who are a pretty big funding body in London. That was through applying with a script and if it was shortlisted you got the money to make it. The budget was £18 000 and there were five films made each with budgets of £18 000.

WAS THAT A BIG STEP UP IN BUDGET FOR YOU?

Yes a huge step up. We were used to making something much longer for much less money and also on this one they imposed certain constraints, you had to pay everyone equity rate, which is fine, it's the right way to do it. I don't like short changing anyone but we actually found the £18 000 tighter than making the 'Eliminator' because previously we were just our own bosses.

WAS THAT SOLELY TAKEN ON BY COUSIN PICTURES YOUR PRODUCTION COMPANY?

Cousins Pictures - Michael Hughes Denis O'Hare and Mik Duffy (who works closely with them as a writer.)

Michael is more involved in the producing end of things and he's also an actor. Denis is more into the design end of things the art





direction and production design and he also looks after the special effects and stunts, so it's good team in the sense that we compliment each others interests, we're not all fighting over the one thing, we've all got separate interests.

AFTER THE EXPERIENCE OF MAKING 'THE ELIMINATOR' AND THE RECENT FILM CAN YOU SEE COUSINS PICTURES NOW BEING YOUR CAREER?

Well yes I think just about. At the minute I'm writing along with Mik and have been for a couple of months and at last I'm being payed to do it so I can say that's what I do. I'm being offered commercials and music videos to do as a director quite separately and meeting more and more people who are interested in developing projects, mainly across the water and some down here. There is quite little going on in the North filmwise.

THERE IS A LOT OF TALK ABOUT THE MONEY COMING INTO FILM PRODUCTION IN THE NORTH, IS THAT FILTERING THROUGH TO NEW FILMMAKERS?

It is through projects like Re- but I think to be honest the money they have is quite limited. The money can go on administration and things like that. The Film Council as it was known is gone, now they are a Film Commission and I think their number one aim is to attract film-makers into using Northern Ireland as a location, which means that they're trying to coax the likes of Scala Productions, Steve Wooley and Mick Powells company ('The crying game') to film Divorcing Jack in Belfast instead of Dublin or Liverpool. It's set in the North and written by Colin Bateman who is from the North but really it's financed by London. BBC Northern Ireland were involved and there is a Dublin director but really the main crafts people are all brought over from London and the rest of the crew is made up of locals. So that is how it is working at the moment. It's not as though if you're a writer or director and have an idea they're going to snap it up and give you loads of money to make it, which makes sense because people don't have the experience, although just to contradict myself Sunset Heights, a film by a guy from Derry - Colm Villa has just

finished shooting and that has a budget of something like three quarters of a million, so there are exceptions.

SO WOULD YOU SAY THAT THE FILM COMMISSION ARE BEING TOO TENTATIVE WITH THE MONEY OR IS IT A CASE THAT IT JUST ISN'T THERE?

Well I think they probably haven't enough money. My honest opinion about public funding is that if a film can't make back a certain amount of money it doesn't deserve to cost that amount of money to make. So in other words if enough people don't want to see a film to bring in £2 million at the box office, or whatever, it doesn't deserve to have £2 million spent on making it. Maybe a lot of people wouldn't agree with that, like bashing the arts or whatever, but I honestly believe that. If you want to get an industry going that is what the word means, supply and demand. There's no point in making films that people aren't 'in' to and don't want to see because at the end of the day the industry will disappear. In my opinion they should be trying to model it on the American industry, it's their number one export. I'm not saying they should be pumping out American films but they should see the set up there and understand the way they do it. They develop hundreds and hundreds of scripts and maybe ten good ones can come out of it. The problem over here can be that a producer will invest so much money in a script and then he'll be pretty much broke and have to make that film in order to make his money back and maybe his script didn't go quite as well as it could have, whereas his American counterpart or better funded counterpart will develop ten or twenty scripts and then just make one. That's often the trap that people fall into that there is a certain amount of money but there's not just quite enough to make the thing brilliant. I'm coming from obviously a much smaller scale but I'm very proud of the fact that 'The Eliminator' made back all of the money in Ireland alone. It ran in the IFC and it ran in the Queens Film Theatre (QFT) in Belfast and we made back the budget. It only cost £7,500.



SO DID YOU FIND WHEN MAKING 'THE ELIMINATOR' THAT THERE WAS MORE ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE REPUBLIC THAN IN THE NORTH OF IRELAND?

There was at that time. When we were shooting 'The Eliminator' it was the summer of 1994 and at that time the Irish Film Board were relaunched and Braveheart was being shot but there wasn't the amount going on as there is now. To be honest we didn't actually approach anybody to help us with the film because we were so sure that they wouldn't be interested because of the sorts of films that they were funding and involved with; sort of culturally veined or high brow. It was only when we got into post production that we sort of thought that we should contact them but we still didn't get any.

'THE ELIMINATOR' DEALS WITH THE SITUATION IN THE NORTH IN QUITE A BLACK HUMOURED HORROR SCHLOCK MANNER

That was the idea with it, that's why we used 'Alternative Ulster' (Stiff Little Fingers) to show an alternative view of Northern Ireland or the fact that there was something else up there and that people weren't all obsessed with the troubles at a serious level. So we were obviously influenced by all those schlock horror films of the late 70s early 80s, the video nasty era, 'The Texas Chainsaw Massacre', 'Evil Dead', 'Basket Case' etcetera and I suppose we saw that they were made by a group of friends and we thought we could achieve something like that on a low budget.

DO YOU THINK THAT THERE IS ENOUGH OPPORTUNITY FOR FILMMAKERS TO EXPLORE SUCH DIFFERENT APPROACHES?

I think the film business is like any other business really. Lets say you want to be a chef: nobody's going to take you on until you've proven that you can cook etc. It's the same in the film business that you have to get up and do something yourself and show people that you are capable of the work. Whether you can do that easier or better at college or at home with a camcorder and a



group of friends, or however best you think you can showcase your skills. You have to do that because film making is too expensive and competitive for people just to take on your word that you can do it. You have this great script but you're the one who has to direct, why should people invest all that money, at some point you have to put yourself on the line and say here is what I have done.

DO YOU THINK THAT THE PROCESSES ARE IN PLACE THAT WILL TAKE NEW FILMMAKERS ON ONCE THAT INITIAL STEP HAS BEEN MADE?

I think that if you have a script for a film that people really want to see then it will get made, and if you are talented enough then you will be taken on, or producers will snap you up. Producers are all interested in meeting people, film-makers with ideas and talent because that is their bread and butter.

CAN YOU SEE THE NORTHERN IRELAND FILM COMMISSION DEVELOPING IN THE SAME WAY THAT THE IRISH FILM BOARD HAS OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS?

I think actually that the new Labour Government in Britain have some new changes to funding to be implemented and I think if they do come in that I would say that the Republic is in trouble because it would mean that the international producers that were coming here will just go across the water, where, at the end of the day; there are bigger and better studios, there are more skilled technicians and it would be easier to make films over there. They've got all the same scenery so you can do any period. That will affect the Republic and Northern Ireland as well. It would be good to see Northern Ireland develop. I've been reading pieces about Ireland being the flavour of the month for producers internationally, and the film industry has to be looked at on a global scale. The bottom line is that film is marketed globally, and in that global view Ireland is quite popular at the moment and Northern Ireland is getting a wee taste of it at the moment. It will depend on the quality of films that come out, what *Divorcing Jack* is going to be like, what *Sunset Heights* is like, if they're absolute

dogs and disappear without a trace then that will be that for a while but then maybe they'll be great and people will connect them very strongly to the place.

DO THE FESTIVALS WORK IN FAVOUR OF THE NEW FILMAKER AND ARE THERE ENOUGH PLACES AND INTEREST IN THE WORK FOR IT TO BE SHOWN?

Yes the festivals in Ireland are great. There are enough places to show and they're improving all the time, our new one 'Flying Saucer..' actually won something at the Cork festival so we love Cork. The others are great, the Foyle Festival is getting better and better. The festival in Belfast is just attached to the Queens Festival or the Arts Festival which is maybe no harm, but it would be interesting to see what would happen if there was a separate film festival. Although it's pretty good as it sits.

SO IF THERE IS ENOUGH OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE AND SHOW FILMS ARE THERE ENOUGH SCRIPTS TO MAKE THE FILMS?

I think there is. The truth of the matter is that people here want to see work from other countries and it's only elsewhere that the Irish stuff stands out. We've been all over the world really with 'The Eliminator' and then we stopped going to the festivals, they're great craic but you find that six months can disappear. They pay your way and put you up, so it's great fun but I didn't do anything for six months, so we actually stopped going and just sent the film. Recently there I decided to go to a few more because I'd been invited to Canada and then down to New York and then to Hungary, and it is really strange to see the film in those places and the reaction to it. Just the other day I got a review of the film posted to me from a Canadian newspaper and the way they had looked at it was just bizarre, it was on its head. They thought it was like an IRA film. I was stunned when I read the review. It was a really good review but the way they had looked at it they thought it was very political.

We've been very lucky with our festival showings, there have





been one or two where it didn't go down too well but overall it's been great. The festivals are invaluable for getting the work seen and then acquisitions. All the TV stations and distribution companies have all their scouts at the different festivals and we've got a couple of good sales at festivals. We sold 'The Eliminator' in Japan and in Germany and we've been offered by people like Troma in the United States. Now 'Flying Saucer..' has been going far far better, unfortunately we don't get anything out of the sales but Canal+ and Arte and a lot of the really big stations around Europe have been giving big offers, which I'm really chuffed about. So the festivals are invaluable for promoting films on any level whether it's a really low budget film like 'The Eliminator' or a big new release.

SO WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP NOW FOR COUSINS PICTURES?

Well 'Flying Saucer Rock'n'Roll Roll' is being shown in festivals at the moment, it hasn't been shown down here yet but Rod Stoneman was talking about trying to get it shown before a feature in the theatres so maybe that is how that will work. At the moment myself and Mik are writing as I say, we're working on a couple of scripts for longer films for features and it's really a matter of seeing which one of them gets funded. One is being developed by BBC films exactly the same way 'Divorcing Jack' was developed so maybe that will be the next one to go or there is another one that's in development with a company in London.

SO HOW DO YOU GEAR YOURSELF FOR THE NEXT STEP UP, NATURALLY YOUR NOT GOING TO AIM YOUR NEXT PROJECT TO BE A VERY LOW BUDGET FILM?

I think you can't because you've used up all those favours. I think the script we'll do next is one called 'Frock Cop' about a transvestite Policeman, it would be a much bigger budget. It's not as quirky or niche markety as 'The Eliminator' it's a lot more mainstream but it's still pretty upbeat. It's an action film first and foremost and the way that is sitting at the moment is, if everything

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goes to plan, BBC films would come in, in part, and there are a number of other companies who may come in as well. I couldn't put a figure on what that would cost but hopefully it will be a good feature film budget.

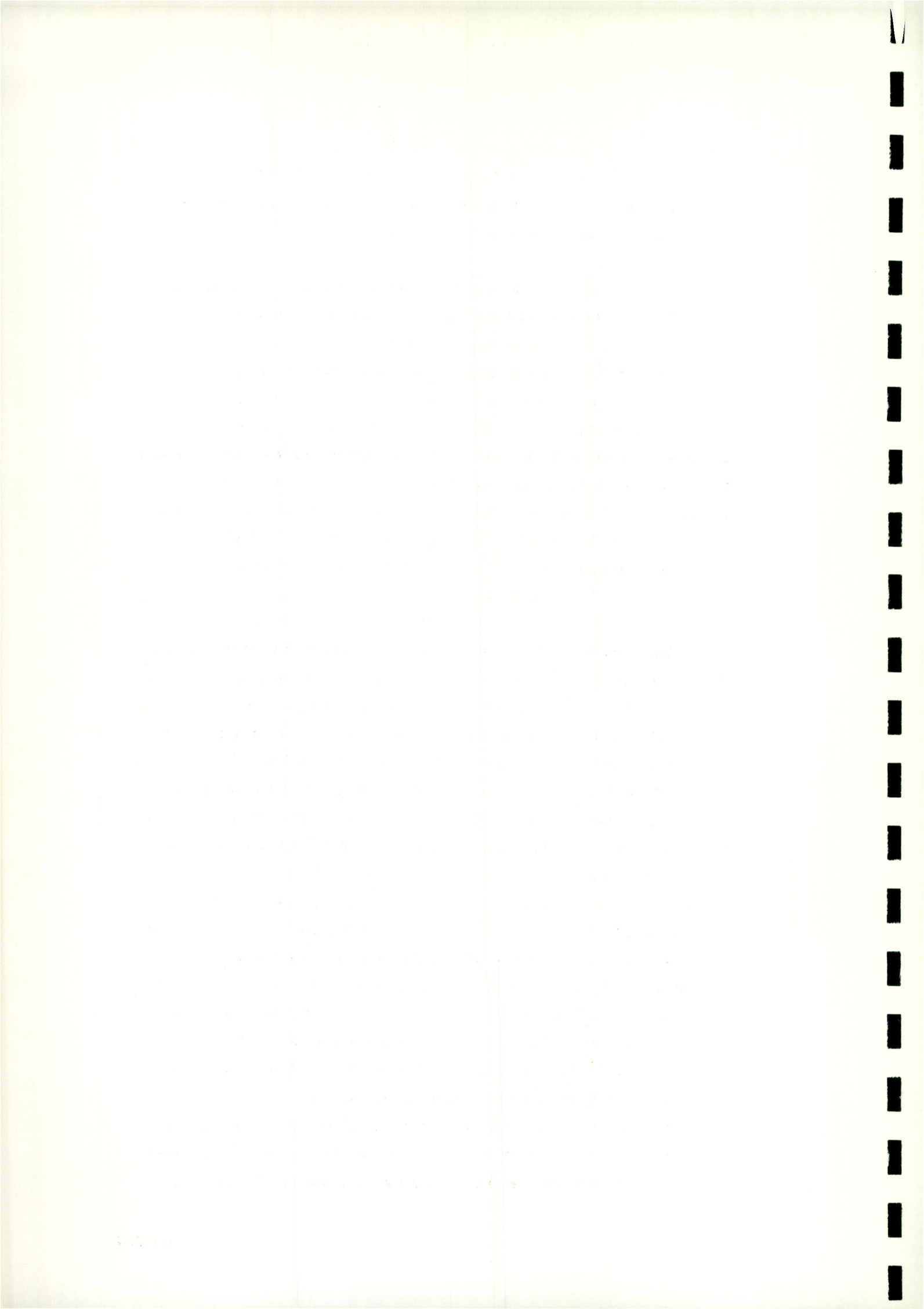
DO YOU FIND YOURSELF WRITING TO A BUDGET?

Not really at the moment but with 'The Eliminator' certainly we were, 'oh look there's a plane let's write that in.' With 'Flying Saucer.' I don't think we did we wrote the script the way we wanted and we were able to achieve it on the budget so I think we're able to let that go bit by bit.



**Richard Taylor** - Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Film Commission in interview, 5th January 1998

Can I say one thing as an overview about the North and the South, you have to site the whole thing in the political reality of the Republic of Ireland, a country that in 1921/22 set itself up; so many of the structures and systems in the south are modelled on UK systems but for 75 years it has developed as an autonomous entity and for many years, particularly in the 1930s, the state was struggling to invent its own cultural identity and you had a whole wave of stuff through the 1930s 40s and 50s of Irish cultural product in the south that was about cultural identity. So by the time the economy got stronger and visions and politics had become much more focused by the 1970s the conditions were in place, particularly in the 70s with the troubles up here affecting a lot of people's attitudes about Irish culture in the South, there was a lot of energy that lead to the establishment of the Irish Film Board Mark 1 which was about 1981. However, it got blown away within about 5 years. If you look at all the aspirations of the people that set up the Irish Film Board M1 in 1981, they really only came to fruition in 1993. There was a fifteen year period between the vision being there, the right vision, like not knocking down Ardmore, like Tax breaks, like a film board, possibly a film commission, although that was a much later concept, they were all there but it took fifteen years to do it, but they got there, with political will, Michael D Higgins, Labour Government, vision, passion, everything else. It is going to be very, very difficult to sustain. The success, and my hat is off to them, is the political will and it came with a single focused Labour Government. The other political parties are much more confused in my view with what they are doing with Irish cultural identity. In the same way we have a new Labour Government, and will hopefully have for the next five to ten years, it is going to affect us enormously; we will see a massive reawakening of focus of cultural identity. Both in the South of Ireland and the UK the more visionary people at the top of those Governments understand intuitively the importance of an

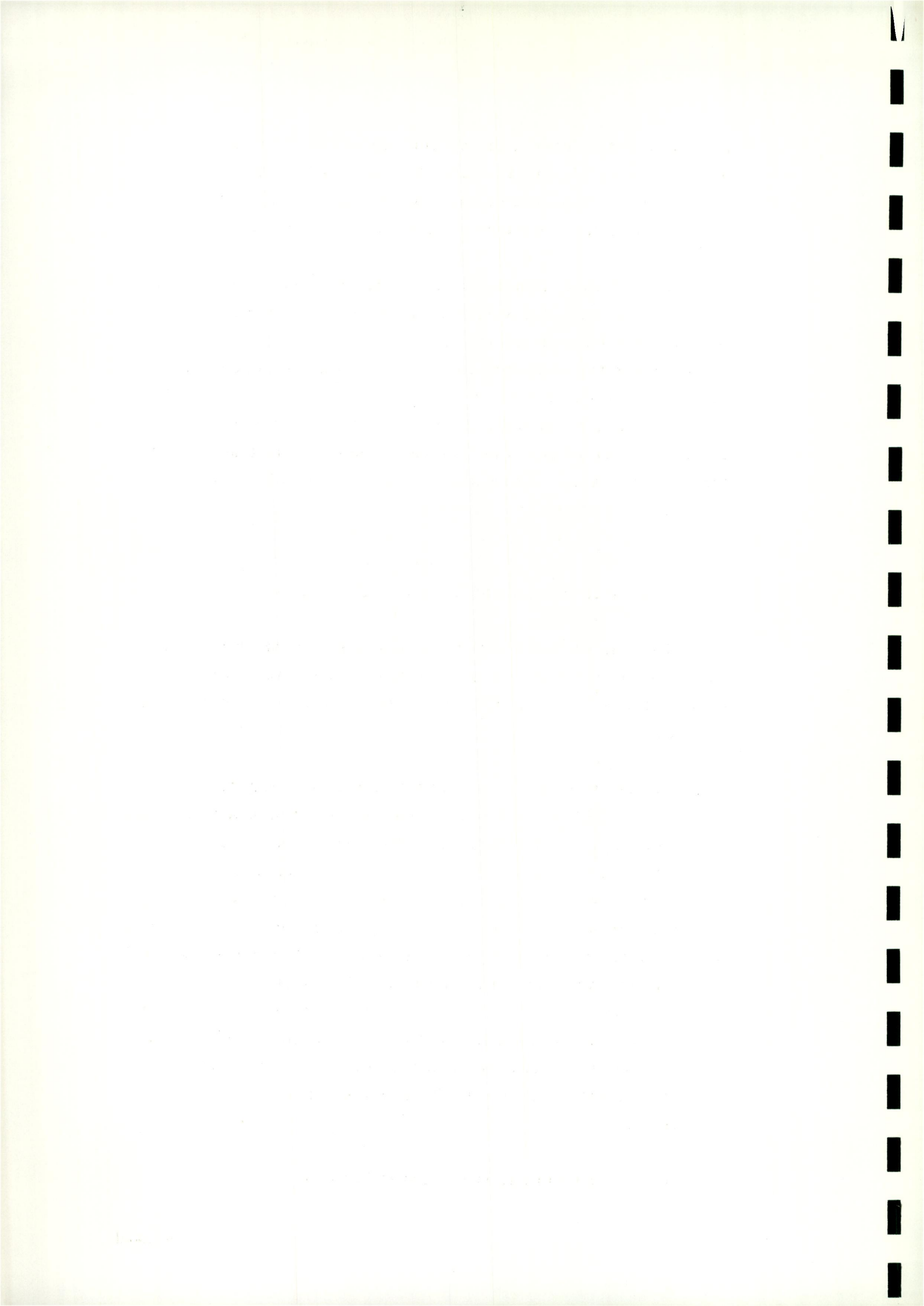


indigenous film culture and you can't get a culture without an industry so the two things are kind of intertwined, it's about projecting an image of a place. I don't want to talk about the kind of image that has come out of the South of Ireland in the last number of years because I think that is ground that has been well trodden and I think that is one of the reasons for the success of 'I Went Down' is that it is running counter to a lot of the stuff that has been the hallmark of Irish product.

That is trying to give you the bigger picture, you can't compare the North and South without comparing the national cultural agendas. One of my personal opinions of the problems that are going to occur in Ireland over the next number of years is that the building on the framework document in the setting of the peace process is bringing Dublin into closer contact with London than it otherwise would have had to do. The only solution to the North is a country that has spent 75 years getting away from the UK actually getting closer to it, structurally.

There is no doubt that the commitment of the last Labour Irish Government to developing the film industry and other cultural industries as an obvious background in other confidence building measures in Ireland has been very firmly noticed by other people all over the world, particularly the UK and everything that Michael D Higgins did was avidly watched and discussed by people in England. We got a Labour Government second of May last year; by the second week in May Tom Clark, the film minister and Chris Smith the secretary of State for Culture were in Cannes saying that there is 30 million pounds for 3 franchisees. The Arts Council of the UK has given 30 million pounds to three different consortiums, which is a lot of money, which is going to create a much more stable entity in the UK than ever before and will have an impact all the way round, and then there is still lottery money available for production. They announced that and they also announced a film policy review group and that group is reporting next month in London which is about the whole sorting out of the UK mess of different semi state institutions of which there are about eleven involved in film in one way or another; there is the British Screen, the British Film Institute, The British Film Commission, British





Screen Advisory Council, British Council Film Division, Skillset, it's a mess and that is being looked at, sorted out. That report is going to recommend the rationalisation of the UK approach to film, finance, production, development, exhibition, distribution, training.

The model of this agency has had a number of precursors most notably Scotland, we are modelled on Scottish Screen which was created last year out of four different agencies, we created this last year out of one agency which was the old Film Council but we added bits to it and made it stronger. There are all sorts of specific details about the financial package, we are not a quango or permanently set up in any shape or form, we are a short term funded organisation unlike the Irish Film Board which is a statutory semi state agency.

WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND FILM COMMISSION AT THE MOMENT?

Well, it's a twin thrust, to attract producers in because there aren't enough here to generate enough work but at the same time develop the indigenous industry. They are indivisible parts of the same thing.

In December of '96 the Government here announced what they called a four million pound package for film and that consists of an allocation of two million pounds from the Arts Councils lottery fund for film production here, a million pounds of new money from the special support programme for peace and reconciliation of which we are spending just under about £600 000 on development loans and around £400,000 on the promotion of locations and building the infrastructure. The other million is other funds that we get from the Department of Education partly to run this business, partly to fund other people like Queens Film Theatre and the Film Festivals, training and all the other bits of income that we get. That's how the package works out, over roughly a two year period.

One of the short term objectives is to get a separate

Northern Ireland production fund there are a number of other objectives with training and development as well, I think it is extremely important not to get too carried away and they did in the South a bit with production, production, production because unless you start thinking about distribution and promotion, when you look at the amount of films financed by the Film Board that haven't been seen anywhere, then you start to ask questions.



**Andrew Reid** - Locations Officer for the Northern Ireland Film Commission in interview 5th January 1998.

THE MAIN THRUST OF THE COMMISSION SEEMS TO BE PROMOTING NORTHERN IRELAND AS A LOCATION.

The idea is really that we looked at the situation and realised that we couldn't promote locations, crews and facilities on the merit of, we have wonderful locations, brilliant crews and first class facilities because everybody has the opportunity to say that. The big difference between us and other Commissions is our approach to our development fund. The development fund is there to attract producers to look at Northern Ireland from the very script stage, from the very basis of making the film and we say that it has to be primarily set in Northern Ireland so they're looking that way. So they actually turn up, write a script about Northern Ireland and have a look at the development fund, it is Stg£15,000 for a feature and Stg£40,000 in terms of a series, look at our terms which is a 50% premium, say you take Stg£10,000 you pay Stg£15,000 back plus 5% of the proper cost, they may look at that and say they're not going to take it but the point is they're already here, they're already looking and hopefully at that point we can negotiate on our terms. From there on we push the locations very heavily, we assist them in finding the locations, we assist them in tying down their script to specifics. When they have their locations we introduce them to crew and hopefully get them a local production manager. Our main aim is to get people looking at Northern Ireland in terms of writing scripts, we believe that it is a script driven location, the scripts don't have to be about Northern Ireland. We have a young producer here who has the rights to an Ian Banks novel and of course it's set in Scotland but he went to University in Northern Ireland

DO YOU THINK THAT THE COMMISSION WILL BE ABLE TO ATTRACT PEOPLE FROM EUROPE WITH THE DEVELOPMENT MONEY THAT IS BEING OFFERED, BECAUSE IT IS SUBSTANTIALLY SMALLER THAN THAT OFFERED BY THE IRISH FILM BOARD?

Yes, we already are attracting people, money is scarce there are a lot of places to get money from but if you are a first time producer or you have a project that people haven't been forthcoming with funding, our money is exactly the same as British Screen with the same guidelines, so we are a source that can unlock further finance for producers. So we find that we get sort of the pioneer producers who are coming along with something that is just a little bit more risky than other people are willing to put money into. We don't just give it to anybody, obviously they have to have a certain track record, it's the producer and the writer that we look at first. Usually first time writers are going to get a harder time than first time producers.

WOULD IT BE TRUE TO SAY THAT IT MIGHT BE DIFFICULT FOR A FIRST TIME FEATURE FILM WRITER /PRODUCER /DIRECTOR FROM THE NORTH TO GET FUNDING?

The Northern Ireland angle is we have no shortage of talented writers, there will be a sympathy given to those who come from Northern Ireland, again it's on the quality of writing, you can have someone who writes a script for the first time and it is outstanding as is often the case. What we might then do is put them in touch with someone with more experience. We try to keep an eye on the upcoming writers. We certainly know experienced producers and we have found the two tend to find each other with a little bit of guidance, that's what we are here to do. We are here to see that the right people meet each other and the right jobs get worked on, sort of a dating agency for writers and producers.



ROUGHLY HOW MANY APPLICANTS WOULD YOU HAVE, DOES THE FUNDING WORK ON A ROUNDS SYSTEM?

We make our awards as often as necessary, they're spread out quite evenly, not quite quarters but close.

WHAT WAS THE COMMISSION'S CONNECTION WITH 'DIVORCING JACK'?

'Divorcing Jack' turned up as a TV drama about three years ago. I first saw it as a poster on the BBC TV drama wall. I was location manager and personally I had to be involved. I really wanted to be involved and typically I took this job the week they were crewing up. The Northern Ireland Film Commission angle was that we administered the Lottery fund for the Arts Council so obviously it got a grant from that. I'm glad to say it got the right amount because it was being 100% shot in Northern Ireland. We looked at the crews and had a meeting with the producers to discuss the levels of crew from the North. It is our job to ensure local crews are being used, with a large production like 'Divorcing Jack' with a company attached to them and obviously other major investors we can't dictate, we try to get a compromise out of it. They are going to insist on certain key members of crew being available, so we look at the key members of crew but when they start to dictate that they want their three assistants 'I normally work' with then we have to say, "well we want you to look at our number two" and we have to insist that they take on the number three person, then we go and find those people. We give them names of people that we know can do the job. In the case of 'Divorcing Jack' 56% of the crew was from Northern Ireland which we were very pleased with, it didn't look like that was going to be the case at the beginning of the project. We now look at their budgets to make sure that their cash flow is going through, that they're getting money when it's being payed out. We chase up the Arts Council and vice versa. If the Arts Council aren't happy with the way the film is going they'll ring us and ask us if we will have a word with the producer. All the reports come through to us. We don't get involved with the day to day running of the film, that's up to the producers but if there is something very strange then we



do ask, with 'Divorcing Jack' it was run by the most experienced producer in Northern Ireland, Robert Cooper, and it ran very smoothly. There were a few issues with locations which we solved, there were a few issues with finding space to build sets, we found them 14 different industrial locations, we had a slight problem where they wanted to fire weapons in the city centre of Belfast, the RUC were slightly reticent about that so we talked to the operations officers and explained how it would run and came to an agreement. We are here to help and advice and that is what we do.

IS 'DIVORCING JACK' THE LARGEST BUDGET FILM TO BE SHOT IN NORTHERN IRELAND?

Yes, the largest to be solely shot in Northern Ireland. The last largest film to be shot in Northern Ireland was 'December Bride' in 1989 which was a Little Bird production but it wasn't completely shot in Northern Ireland it skipped across the border into Donegal.

THE SOUND STUDIOS AT ARDMORE ARE SOMETHING THAT NORTHERN IRELAND CANNOT OFFER TO PRODUCERS, IS THAT A PROBLEM FOR ATTRACTING COMPANIES?

It hasn't been so far. The people that have come to us so far have had location scripts that have been based in Northern Ireland and have been happy to take over warehouse space to turn it into a sound stage, it's not the ideal situation, it would be great if we could get a studio space but that would come from private investment and public money and if that comes about will be seen. We would like to see that but it has to be at the right time you don't just walk something through. We'll look at what companies want and if it turns out that is what is needed then we will pursue that.

IS THERE MUCH LINKAGE BETWEEN THE IRISH FILM BOARD AND NORTHERN IRELAND FILM COMMISSION?

We have a good relationship with the Irish Film Board, 'Sunset Heights' had Irish Film Board money and it had Northern Ireland Lottery money so we can combine projects. We're very open to the idea. It opens up a whole new area of film-making, we're developing a road movie between Dublin and Belfast, the majority is being shot in Northern Ireland but it starts in Dublin. We could do Dublin if we absolutely had to but the set up is there so why not use it and vice versa. It would be great if the Northern Ireland Film Commission could get a separate fund for joint development with the Irish Film Board.

THE SCREEN COMMISSION OF IRELAND HAS JUST BEEN SET UP, PRESUMABLY THAT IS THE ORGANISATION THAT YOU WOULD HAVE THE DEALINGS WITH?

They have taken the multiple agency route, we are a single agency. Everything is under the one roof because it is such a fledgling industry. There are a large number of groups associated with the Irish Film Board and we have contact with them all, I have a lot of dealings with SCI because they deal with locations. It would be great if a European Screen Commission could come about and we could work in partnership in that. As part of the Association for Screen Commissioners International we are not in competition with any other state of the world really, simply because if we don't have something, and I know where something is then we will send people there.

IS THE AREA OF SOUND AND POST PRODUCTION THE ONLY ASPECT OF FILMAKING WHERE NORTHERN IRELAND FALLS SHORT?

Post production can be done in a little room these days if you have a lightworks or an avid it can be cobbled together. We have so much equipment here that I think we're reaching saturation point for the amount of work we do. We're obviously keen that



when production companies come here to work that they actually do not fly in their equipment, that they actually use ours. Ireland doesn't have a lab for high quality work so everything has to go to London or Manchester, so there's no difference there between us and the Republic. People have to travel, it's a nomadic industry. At least in Northern Ireland two hours and you're anywhere, you can literally film in a city in the morning and be on a beach by early afternoon or in the mountains.

CAN YOU SEE A STAGE WHEN THERE WILL BE A SELF SUPPORTIVE NORTHERN IRELAND FILM INDUSTRY IN THE SENSE THAT IT WILL BE ENTIRELY A PRODUCT OF NORTHERN IRELAND FILMMAKERS?

I'm not sure that that is a healthy thing to not have people coming in from the outside, it makes for a very incestuous relationship. It also produces exactly the same things over and over again. A good example of that would be the German industry. They are so heavily subsidised that a lot of the work is very much the same, they don't have to look outside of Germany for anything. It's great having people coming in, I want to see the day when the majority of crews working here are from Northern Ireland, and I'd love to see the day when there is an even crossing between crews from here working elsewhere, broadening their experience.

SO WOULD YOU SAY THAT THERE IS ENOUGH STATE BACKING IN THE FUNDING AT THE MOMENT?

The lottery fund is great. It's certainly a step in the right direction, very efficient. There's never enough money, it's as simple as that. On the economic development side of things I certainly think we're making steps in the right direction, what I think we need to do is get the work in to prove that it is a worthwhile industry to be investing in. I think we can do that and as long we do we will continue to get a backing and we can have a serious industry. The worry is that we do well and then the attitude is they're on their own so the backing stops.



WHAT ABOUT SOMETHING ALONG THE SAME LINES AS SECTION 35 IN THE NORTH?

Tax incentives are great but they're not a long lasting thing, they do tend to create an artificial atmosphere. A lot of people find the lottery fund better than Section 35 because it's cash in hand, you don't have to put a large amount of money in the Bank to protect your investment. It is a matter of getting that funding through application but it is a good core to gather other investors around. Section 35 is great but the pros and cons need to be weighed, people are now saying that they aren't getting what they thought they were getting. Although it certainly is the best tax break in the world, I was at a convention in L.A. discussing tax breaks and nothing has the efficiency that Section 35 has, they really did take their hats off to the Irish for producing that.

We have some things that we take for granted like VAT exemption for businesses, something that the Americans don't have at all. The VAT back from hotel bills can actually be an amazing incentive to the Americans. We set up a UK company and they can get the VAT back. A company coming from outside the country can get their VAT back by simply taking the product out of the country. They have an exchequer set up that 17.5% of the investment is returned to you. So it is a considerable amount, so these are things that we point out to people.

DOES THE COMMISSION HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH COORDINATING PRIVATE INVESTMENT?

No that is left to the producer, on the first day of filming we get our development money back, at that point it really is up to the producer how they handle their finance. If you look at it in terms of the lottery then we look at the package to see is it a viable package.

OVERALL WOULD YOU BE FAIRLY CONFIDENT ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMISSION IN NORTHERN IRELAND?

Well let's put it this way, January '97 there was no commission, there were no films being made. January '98 we have fifteen projects in development because they have been attracted here by the changes we have made. Outside of that we have other production companies who are coming here to film that don't need funding but the local knowledge and crews that we can help them with. Things are looking positive. We need to build a structure and we are in the process of making that work.