

Propaganda

Grierson Has Tricks Of His Own

By OAKLEY DALGLEISH

Ottawa, Feb. 4.—John Grierson, Commissioner of the National Film Board, has arrived. The commissioner's appointment last week as managing director of the ailing Wartime Information Board did it.

There was a thought on his arrival that John wouldn't stay longer than to administer a few purgatives. Two such big jobs, some



John Grierson.

thought, were too much for one man to do well and live happily. Any one who knows of the Grierson philosophy of propaganda, his views on propaganda in Canada and his capacity for work, couldn't think that—not for long. John Grierson doesn't think it.

John Grierson is a tidy little man in a very untidy little world. A neat five-feet-one-and-a-half, Scotch and 43, he is a psychologist of mass action. He studied to be one at the University of Chicago, out from England on a Rockefeller fellowship. The background was Glasgow University and a chore of minesweeping in the last war.

The impact American crowds made on him stuck. He thinks in the dimensions of crowds, he mills around in crowds, he talks to them, plays to them. In less than two years he has practically crowded himself right off Film Board property, so fast has he developed the psychology of mass action in the accumulation of a staff.

After five minutes of Grierson conversation—just a breathful—you have a warm feeling of knowing the man—which is silly. John has a flow of conversation that is, by sentences, persuasive and commanding, caustic and charming, convincing and alarming. He is as unpredictable as next month's weather.

Changes Mood Quickly.

He can be earthy; or a drawing-room intellectual with only a semicolon to make the change in. He can drip contempt, while beaming good humor. And his humor is good fun. He has both the courage and the will to use purgatives on the costive areas of official Ottawa. He is either a very poor or an extremely good civil servant, one can't be sure.

The Grierson imagination, probably his great talent, is as wide as the horizon and as vivid as a sunset. He will have at least one idea on any subject you care to mention and is prepared to expose it in detail. Whatever else there is in it, his idea will be dramatic.

Drama is part of the Grierson technique. The Film Board, bulging out of a made-over barn, is dramatic. It swarms with intense, idea-ridden geni Grierson has culled from every profession, calling and trade excepting, perhaps, the clergy and the picture-making business. N. F. B.'s dramatization of itself lets him down—a rather amateurish burlesque of a Hollywood legend.

Under John the N.F.B. has made the big-time, if only in a small way. Its documentary films, which were his recommendation to the job, have won top billing among the best. Whether this makes the Film Board a success can and will be debated. Pictures like Churchill's Isle, the Story of Oil, Geopolitik, where the job was editing other people's film, including the excellent German war newsreels, into a compact bit, stay better in memory than those in which most of the camera work and direction were native.

How good is the Film Board outside these little classics? No unprejudiced person has seen all the board has done, and most of its yardage is reeled up in things other than documentary. The newsreel pieces and the graphic war publicity shorts have a high and consistent percentage of corn. It could be that the sparkling genius, what with documentaries, organization and promotion, has not had the time to give them.

Started at Bottom.

Grierson got his start in pictures at the bottom, from the outside. In England, where he began making documentary films as government propaganda, he had to sell himself minus any experience as a motion picture maker and a new idea about making motion pictures at the same time. It was hard, but he did it.

With this background, inexperience as a promoter of the printed word and inexperience in Canadian journalism couldn't have been much of an obstacle to his taking the job of general manager of Wartime Information Board, created, as it was, for him. Newsmen can be impregnated with the philosophy of propaganda to do the job. Besides, it is doubtful if Grierson will lean very heavily on the printed word.

Study the development of the Film Board and the Grierson technique, and it is possible to see how he counts W.I.B. and N.F.B. as the complement of each other. But if he stays at W.I.B., which he will whoever else goes, one thing will probably get changed. John Grierson doesn't go for feeding the people gobs of information. Give them simple patterns, dramatized patterns to fix their thinking along definite lines. If you can fix their thoughts, so much the better. That is good propaganda.

Consider Appointment.

Ottawa, Feb. 4 (CP).—Appointment of a new chairman to the Wartime Information Board, to replace Charles Vining, who plans to retire because of continued ill health, is receiving consideration of the Government, with the prospect the new chairman will be some one from outside Ottawa, it was learned today.

Mr. Vining, whose home is in Montreal, is expected in Ottawa next week, and it is not expected any action on the appointment of a new board chairman will be taken before then.

It was understood the new chairman's duties will be confined principally to presiding at board meetings, where the broad policy of the W.I.B. is drafted. The understanding was that the new chairman is likely to be a man from outside Ottawa, who will come here only when board meetings are held.

149
WAR
EUROPEAN
1939
CANADA
PROPAGANDA

Grierson