

"The Squamish Five," the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's made-for-TV film about Direct Action/Wimmin's Fire Brigade, was screened across Canada in October. The film, a so-called docu-drama, portrays the five members of Direct Action in a way that takes the reality of their struggle for freedom and justice and turns it into a thinly disguised adventure story to be consumed by mass audiences without question. The film was put together on the basis of wiretap evidence and Julie Belmas' new version of events.

Gerry Hannah, another member of the Vancouver Five, was interviewed on an anarchist radio show in Vancouver the day after the movie was shown on TV. The following is a condensation of the remarks Gerry made during that interview. He began by talking about the portrayal of the individual members of the Vancouver Five.

Brent is one of the most sensitive men I've ever met in my life, and certainly not the patriarchal, field-marshal type that he's portrayed as in the film. I wouldn't want to make him out as some kind of saint, he's a human being, he's got some problems, but the way he's portrayed in the movie is grossly inaccurate.

It makes us all look really stupid -- how could we possibly be involved in a group like that, when we're fighting for equality and positive change in the world, and be listening at the same time to almost Nazi-like, military orders being given to us throughout the whole process. It's ludicrous. There's no way any of us would have stuck around if that had been happening. And there's no way Brent would even consider doing something like that. It wasn't in Brent and it wasn't in us.

Doug's portrayal is quite inaccurate too. Doug's portrayed as a cold, calculating sort of person with no sensitivity again. Doug is an extremely sensitive individual and that doesn't come through in the movie at all. All that comes through in the movie is a sort of callousness. And also he's made to look like a hypocrite from the scenes where someone says that he's against technology. It was completely inaccurate. Doug understands his philosophy on technology and industrialism -- I never perceived him to be hypocritical in that way. We all have to live in this world the way it is now; that doesn't mean we agree with it.

Ann was portrayed as quite a callous person. The main protest I would have is that she's portrayed as a very hysterical person, a person that's ready to blow up fairly fast, very tense and no sense of humour. And again that's quite inaccurate. Ann was constantly joking, constantly making other people laugh. The whole concept of her giving orders is ridiculous.

And the whole concept of leaders is just a fabrication. Partly a fabrication that began immediately upon our arrest. But more so a fabrication since Julie decided to go against her former feelings and her former friends and try and portray herself as being very little responsible for the actions that she was involved in. And in order for her to do that she had to paint leaders and make herself look like she was being led around. And so Brent and Ann became the targets for that.

There was no leader. The group made decisions on a consensus basis -- unlike the way it was portrayed in the film with the Wimmin's Fire Brigade when it was a majority vote and that was the end of discussion and they called it consensus. Basically we discussed things through until everybody in the group was comfortable with a particular line of action. Or at least was willing to go with a particular line of

action, not seeing any alternative. Which happened sometimes. The robbery wasn't something everybody felt comfortable with; I certainly didn't feel comfortable with it, but at the same time I did accept it as being the only alternative that was available to us.

We tried to operate in the most egalitarian way that we could. And if people had personal problems we made an attempt to talk about those problems and deal with them. I won't say that we always dealt with them as well as we could of, that's not true. But there's several instances in this movie of Brent saying, for instance, "We're doing the robbery and that's that." Well, that's just hogwash. There's no way Brent would have ever said something like that. And there's no way anybody would have listened to him if he had. No one told anyone what they were going to do; we tried to avoid power dynamics.

I would say guilt is part of Julie's motive. I would say another part of Julie's motive is fear of prison, and an inability to deal with prison, which is understandable, of course. But her methods of dealing with it, well, they're understandable again but they're not acceptable. I think to a lot of people they're not acceptable.

But I wouldn't say that it's just Julie trying to paint that picture. I would say that the film itself has to move within certain parameters and those parameters are really narrow because it's the State, it's the CBC, and they can't ask certain questions that need to be asked. They've got to play along stereotyped ways. Even if they did understand mutual responsibility they can't portray it.

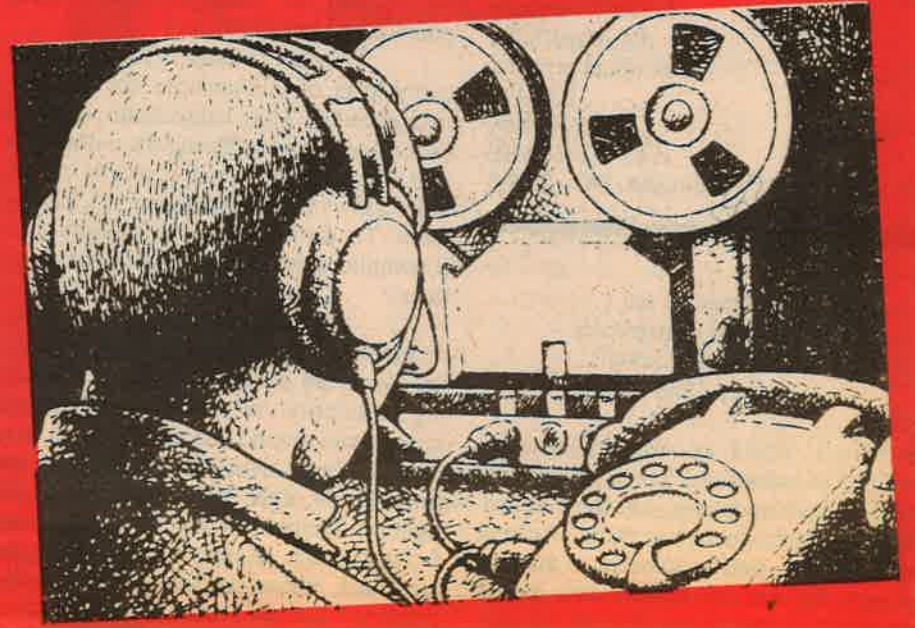


I thought [my portrayal] was pretty unflattering. I couldn't laugh about much about the movie but I was able to get a chuckle about that. I don't know exactly what led them to portray me that way -- obviously I think it's inaccurate. I don't know whether it was based on Julie's information that led them to portray me like that -- Julie must have thought I was

# S-I=film

awful dumb -- or whether it was the wiretaps. I think maybe they just really didn't know how to portray me so they just took some stereotyped image of a punk-rocker and built up their own myth. I think also Julie was probably reluctant to say too much about my political involvement or my involvement in the illegal stuff that we were doing. I think Julie tried to "protect" me to a certain extent. And that probably led CBC to have this

how can it have no effect on them? That is very much a constraint. So there were lots of questions that these people couldn't possibly ask in the film, considering who they were making the film for. And I think because they knew so little about the characters, about the people actually involved in the actions, that they had to, to a large extent, manufacture characters. And it seems like they manufactured characters based on their own



really flat character that they didn't know what to do with.

This film isn't just inaccurate politically, and it doesn't just assassinate us as people, as characters, and trivialize politics, it's also just plain a bad film. The acting is very poor; the screenplay is poor; none of the characters are believable; the story isn't believable. And that not just me, or the left, criticizing that, that's wide criticisms that are being made of the film. It's a CBC made-for-TV movie, pretty classic in the fine tradition of the CBC.

I think the film makers probably felt all along that the finished product wasn't going to be accurate. The film isn't just a character assassination, it is inaccurate in sequence, in people doing particular things, characters credited with carrying out certain actions that in fact other people carried out. They have to be defensive about it because it's based on very biased sources of information; it's based on interviews that they did with Julie, and the wiretaps. Julie's interviews were, for the most part, self-serving interviews, designed to make her look less responsible for the activities than she was. And the other source of information, the wiretap transcripts, were put together by the prosecutors and were designed to convict us. So as far as the producers and writers maintaining that this is somehow a neutral, non-biased approach, it's just ludicrous. It flies in the face of fact. There's no way that anyone can see those sources of information as being neutral.

The film makers admitted, when they were being asked questions by people at a film workshop, that if they had produced a movie that CBC thought was overly sympathetic to us or our causes, it never would have been made. And yet they claim at the same time that that had no effect on them, knowing that. Well,

life experiences. I feel sorry for those producers and writers 'cause they must have awful friends. I wouldn't have been willing to put my life on the line every day if I was with four goofs, four power maniacs, four extremely unstable, hysterical people. I wouldn't have done it.

My privacy was invaded from day one, and I've become desensitized to that. But I think it's wrong, what they've done is wrong. From their perspective it was necessary for them to dig through wiretaps because we refused to collaborate. [We refused because] we knew, because of who was producing this movie, that it was going to end up being what it ended up being. The only difference would have been that if the four of us had co-operated with them then they would have been able to say, "This film is legitimate, because everybody in the group co-operated with it, and they were all behind it and support it too." They've made a horrible movie; they've made our lives worse; they've trivialized and over-simplified complex processes that were going on and are still going on, but at least they don't have that. At least they can't claim that we supported their efforts, or we were actively involved. Because we weren't.

I should say, I guess I sound pretty negative about Julie's involvement and I think I should state again that I don't agree with what Julie's done but at the same time I don't hate her, and I don't wish her any ill. I think she's gone through plenty and is just as much a victim as any of the rest of us. I think she's actually damaged her own reputation and personality as much as anyone's, by being involved in this movie. So while I criticize and cannot approve of what she's done, I don't think that's a reason to hate her. And I think that we should be understanding and compassionate of her.