

Dyer promotes neutrality

by Julie Scott

Journalist Gwynne Dyer says Canadian officials treat suggestions made in his recent films as the "diplomatic equivalent of AIDS."

But in a cross-country tour Dyer and film producer Tina Viljoen note that audiences are heeding their controversial call for a neutral Canada.

The Dyer-Viljoen team will make Carleton University their next stop on Tuesday Mar. 17 when they show their latest film *Harder Than it Looks*, and debate it with a representative from External Affairs.

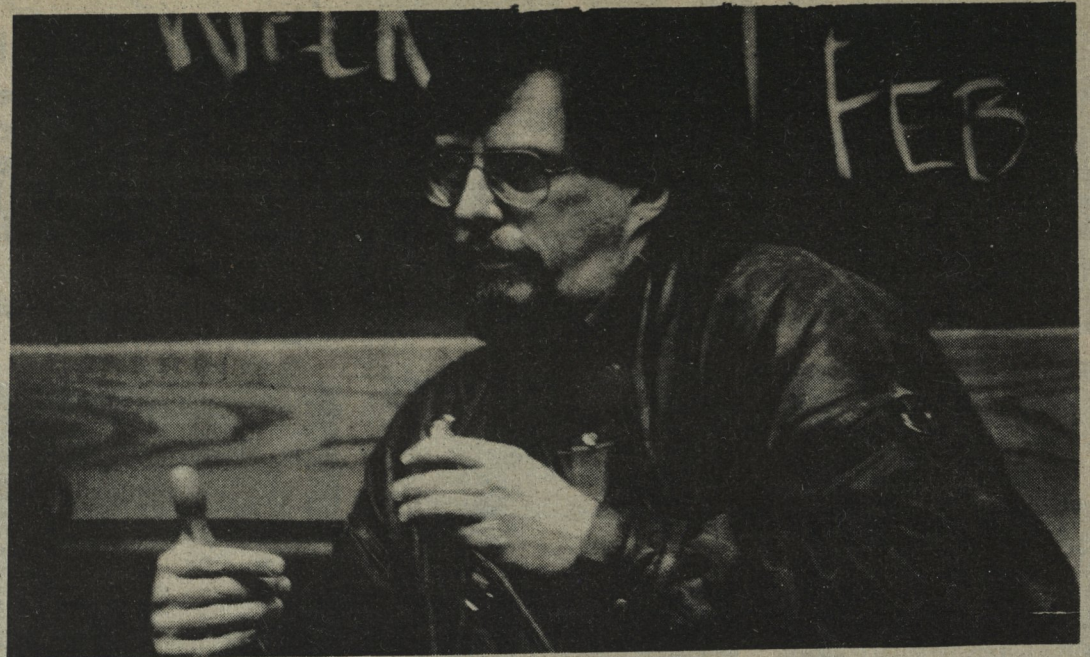
Department of National Defence (DND) officials and politicians first flung criticism at Dyer and Viljoen following their film series *The Defence of Canada*, aired last March on CBC. Rather than playing the pawn in the superpower game, the films suggested Canada could lessen the chances of nuclear war by quitting its entangling alliances.

Joe Clark, Minister of External Affairs, and defence minister Perrin Beatty have said Dyer's stand is unrealistic.

In an October speech Beatty suggested that leaving NATO would turn Canada into an "international freeloader," incapable of defending its own territory.

Dyer said he was shocked at the response to the film — not at how officials at DND and External Affairs reacted, but at the response of the Canadian people. "I was expecting letters stating objection but I didn't get many. What we were saying was not too far ahead of what Canadians are thinking."

In a Gallup poll after the *Canada* series two out of three Canadians said they favored sticking with Canadian alliances. "This was an extraordinary response," said Dyer. "We expected a greater number, something like four out of five."



Journalist Dyer says Canada should quit NATO.

Canadians are beginning to understand the nature of alliances, he said. "Removing ourselves from this game is not a horrible prospect for most people."

David Code of DND's information office said calling Canada a pawn is an "insulting suggestion. We have sought the protection of our sovereignty in an association of like minded countries because it is in our interest." He said "A lot of the Canadian public rejects Mr.

Dyer's views," but he admitted he has had "very little expression from the general public."

Canada's performance at the United Nations indicates Canada is not a decisive factor in the Western alliance. Out of 22 American 'no' votes on 1986 UN disarmament resolutions, Canada cast nine 'no' votes, 10 abstentions, and voted 'yes' for three. Canada usually abstains or votes with the U.S. on nuclear questions.

The latest Dyer-Viljoen film goes one step further than the *Canada* series and outlines the possibility of alternative defensive arrangements. The opposition has been quick to respond.

General George Bell, president of the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies at York University, spoke at the Conference of Defence Associations (CDA) annual seminar in January. "This is a slick, unapologetic, unbalanced, advocacy film," he said.

But Dyer responded, "unbalanced is what you call other people's arguments...His argument is just as much advocacy as ours but he's drawing conclusions from different premises." Bell's premises, said Dyer, are that "the Russians are evil and alliances have prevented nuclear war since 1945," and therefore NATO and NORAD are desirable.

Despite Bell's opposition, Dyer said not all of DND rejects the film. The military in the field "know there is more than one way to skin the cat. A lot of servicemen don't agree with our conclusions but they are not outraged by the suggestions."

Bell disagreed, saying public opinion is divided. "Only the radical fringes of the peace movement see neutrality as a possibility. I don't think that when the majority thinks it (neutrality) through it would choose this option."

The CDA should mobilize to counter Dyer's film, said Bell. Made up of 12 member associations representing the Canadian forces and business, the CDA is a lobby group for national defence. Bell also suggested the CDA request a Commons committee review and hold hearings on the film.

Bill Yost, retired brigadier-general and director of CDA operations, said the National Film Board went overboard with the most recent Dyer-Viljoen film. "As opposed to giving equal

space to air the benefits of Canadian policy, (the film) misleads people by only representing Gwynne Dyer."

CDA members will likely respond to the viewing of the film at Carleton, said Yost.

Dyer maintained the films raises the neutrality question at a time when the Canadian public is receptive and this threatens Canadian officials. Clearly DND and External Affairs think their "ox is being goaded," said Dyer. "There is the feeling out there that our ideas would do defence policy a lot of good." ■

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