

MARTIN ŠRAJER / 10. 3. 2025

# Indian Summer or Exploring Canada for Nothing

One of the possibilities for the people of Socialist Czechoslovakia to explore distant lands was to watch travelogues made by Rudolf Krejčík. Just like many of his colleagues, Krejčík took advantage of political liberalisation in the 1960s and along with his crew visited Sweden (*A Sun Called Lucy* [Slunce zvané Lucie, 1965]), Brasil (*A Handful of Brazilian Pebbles* [Hrst kamínků z Brazílie, 1966]), Mongolia (*The Land of Three Times* [Země trojího času, 1966]) and Iceland (*Spring at the Milk River* [Jaro na mléčné řece, 1967]).

In August 1967, Krejčík, along with cinematographer Vladimír Skalský and producer Máša Charouzová, travelled to Canada for a month. Under a reciprocal agreement between Czechoslovak Film and Canadian state organisation National Film Board of Canada, he made a feature documentary titled *Indian Summer or Exploring Canada for Nothing* (Indiánské léto aneb Kanadou pro nic za nic, 1968).

The agreement stipulated that Canada would send a crew of three to Czechoslovakia along with film stock. In return, the hosts would provide some additional crew members and complete filming equipment which meant Krejčík's crew had a Canadian first assistant camera, production assistant, sound engineer and gaffer.

Canadian filmmakers, led by director David Bairstow, made a 16mm film titled *Twenty-four Hours in Czechoslovakia* (1968). The film follows Canadian hockey superstar Stan Mikita from the Chicago Blackhawks during his one-day visit in his native Czechoslovakia. We see him and his wife and daughters visiting Prague landmarks and the Slovakian village Sokolce where he was born in 1940.

Krejčík's film was made to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Canadian Confederation which culminated at the EXPO 67 in Montreal, but its

focus is much wider. It was filmed during Canadian Indian summer and the narrator's opening question "What is typical for Canada?" defines its theme. The documentary crew travelled across Canadian provinces and highlighted what they considered typical for the given region.

We find out more about Canadian history and traditions such as the mounted police training, last surviving buffalos and rituals of indigenous people living in reservations. But the film doesn't ignore modernity and progress. The camera captures Toronto high-rise buildings with admiration, tours a tractor factory, a tattoo studio and a "cathedral of consumer society," a shopping mall full of people and goods.

Surprisingly enough, a supermarket with "fifty kinds of cucumbers" isn't presented as a symbol of excessive consumption. On the contrary, the place of abundance becomes a pretext for a cautious dig at the failing supply system in Czechoslovakia. "Our people have it much easier as their only choice in basic situations is" in stock/not in stock," remarks the narrator.

The fact that Canada is ecologically, technologically, culturally more evolved than Czechoslovakia isn't necessarily balanced with a criticism of capitalism. The film explicitly lists the costs of everything so the viewers know that the most important factor here is money, but it still frames luxury as a result of honest work. While viewing a house with an indoor pool, two refrigerators, intercom and golden taps, it's pointed out that the owner isn't a "capitalist exploiter," but an ordinary geologist.

The motif of hard work is represented by harbour workers from Vancouver and men who use hot-air balloons to collect timber from the mountains of British Columbia. We get to know Canada as a country with breathtaking nature and advanced technology which is, just like Czechoslovakia, well disposed towards traditions and the working class. The closeness of both countries is emphasised through interviews with Czechoslovaks living in Canada, filmed on black-and-white film stock.

Not even a demolition derby and a tattoo studio with walls covered by drawings of naked ladies are presented as displays of Western decadence. The film portrays them with witty inquisitiveness typical for all Krejčík's films shot abroad.

In six weeks, the crew travelled about 20 thousand kilometres.<sup>[1]</sup> Mostly by car or the Canadian Pacific Railway. In addition to *Indian Summer*, which won the Czechoslovak Film Award at the Academia Film Festival in Olomouc, Milada Mládková used the filmed footage to make three more short films. *Love in* (1968) introduces young Canadian hippies gathering at the Jeanne-Mance Park in Montreal. <sup>[2]</sup> *Among Us Indians* (Mezi námi Indiány, 1969) recounts the history of North America with focus on the indigenous people of Canada.

The third film, made without the contribution of the National Film Board of Canada, reports on the Czechoslovak participation at the event which was the starting point of the whole journey: *Czechoslovak Pavilion Expo* (Československý pavilion – Expo, 1967). After returning to Czechoslovakia, Krejčík recalled that his crew wasn't expected at the pavilion. As a storage room for the film stock and equipment, the organisers assigned them the toilets of *Kinoautomat* – which premiered at the event in June 1967 – saying that “Mr. Horníček can use the hostess' toilet.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Krejčík's travels around Canada during a time when he was allowed to show things as they were had a less cheerful aftermath. During the events of the 1968 occupation of Czechoslovakia, many hours of unique footage was made. It would have been too risky to develop them in Prague so Krejčík used his Canadian contacts and producer Máša Charouzová took about 7 thousand meters of duplicate negative to Montreal. The footage was later used to make a chronicle of the first seven days of the occupation titled *Seven Days to Remember*.<sup>[4]</sup>

The film with an emotional commentary by Jiří Voskovec was first broadcast by Canadian television on the first anniversary of the invasion. For the next twenty years, it toured various international festivals and in 1990, it finally appeared on Czech screens, marking the end of Rudolf Krejčík's Canadian odyssey.

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**Indian Summer or Exploring Canada for Nothing** (Indiánské léto aneb Kanadou pro nic za nic, Czechoslovakia 1968), director: Rudolf Krejčík, script: Rudolf Krejčík, cinematography: Vladimír Skalský, music: Jiří Šust, editor: Milada Sádková. Krátký film Praha, 74 min.

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**Notes:**

[1] Co je to vlastně Kanada? *Academia film Olomouc: zpravodaj*, 1969, iss. 4, p. 8.

[2] Rudolf Krejčík returned from his trip to Canada. *Filmové informace* 18, 1967, iss. 48, p. 4.

[3] Daniela Nárožníková, S Rudolfem Krejčíkem o ledačems. *Záběr: časopis filmového diváka* 2, 1969, iss. 2, p. 5.

[4] Rudolf Krejčík, Natáčeli jsme invazi. *Dějiny a současnost* 12, 2008, iss. 8, pp. 21–23.