

April '91

Dear Circles film-makers,

After a whole year of crisis we are now happy to write to you with some good news.

As you will recall, in May last year the B.F.I. (British Film Institute) announced it was cutting Circles' grant funding from £23,000 to £9,000. It seemed the Institute felt there was no longer a need for feminist distribution.

As this massive cut meant that Circles was placed on the verge of collapse, we embarked on a public campaign to save Circles and the principles of 'women's distribution'. This campaign has lasted nearly a whole year, during which time Circles' staff of four shrank to two part-time workers helped by a dedicated group of women volunteers who gave up their free time to help keep bookings honoured and the office open. The support we have been shown by all our users is overwhelming. May we take this opportunity to thank all of you who wrote to the B.F.I. on our behalf.

Last Autumn in the midst of the campaign, the Institute commissioned a consultancy study into the financial feasibility of Women's Film Distribution and recommended Circles and the Cinema of Women (the only other feminist film distributor in the U.K.) merge. The consultancy study was carried out by workers from both organisations and a number of exciting projects were investigated, such as selling videos through chain stores. The report was submitted to the B.F.I. in January of this year but sadly rejected on the grounds it would be too costly to fund.

After a further two months of meetings and negotiations, last week the B.F.I. formally announced it would continue to support Circles as a new organisation. (The proposed name for this new company 'Olivia Pictures' will be used as a working title throughout the rest of this letter) In order for Olivia Pictures to come into being, many sacrifices have been made, the most disappointing being the closure of Cinema of Women. Negotiations are underway for Olivia Pictures to take into distribution Cinema of Women's catalogue of work. This is, in part, to ensure a solid and combined basis from which the new company can emerge, along with working towards financial independence as one of the B.F.I.'s conditions of grant.

We feel extremely optimistic about Olivia Pictures' future and we have set to work streamlining our operation so we will be able to offer a cost efficient service to both film-maker and viewer. The principle activity of the re-modelled company will be Marketing & Promotion. To ensure we are able to spend as much time as possible on this activity, the despatch

and print care will be handled by a despatch agency while all bookings will continue to be made directly to Olivia Pictures. We intend to apply for charitable status and launch the new company in July. As one of our predominant aims is to reach an even wider audience with your films and raise our profile nationally and internationally, we feel the new company's image will help us to attain this goal. We will be holding an A.G.M. on Saturday May 25th at 4 O'clock at 113 Roman Rd., London E2 OHU to agree the change of name and adjust our Management Committee so we are not in conflict with charitable law. It will be great if you can come, if not please let us have any ideas or comments you may have.

Last but not least, your royalties. Please accept our apologies for the enormous delay in paying them. Our problem has been this; your royalties fell due at the same time the B.F.I. savagely cut our grant and the money we had in the account at this time was not enough to pay the whole royalty bill. If we had paid most of the royalties at this point, Circles would have gone into insolvent liquidation and the film-makers who had not been paid at this time would have lost out completely. With this dilemma in mind we took a calculated risk and decided to delay payments so we were still in existence to fight. If on the other hand we failed to win back our grant, we felt we had a good case to argue, that the B.F.I. should meet the royalty bill. All of this was only possible if Circles was still going. We never thought it would take this long to resolve and we are conscious of the fact that the delay must have caused hardship. We apologise for this and thank you for the remarkable patience you have shown.

Your '89/90 royalties have been calculated and will be forwarded to you within the next few weeks. When this is complete we shall be running your '90/91 royalties report and payment for this period will follow shortly after.

On behalf of all those who have been working to save Circles, we thank you for having faith in us and for your support throughout this difficult time.

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Liane Harris



Sarah Bratby

(for CIRCLES)