

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

U.S. enemy No. 1? It's Canada, the script says

BY CLYDE FARNSWORTH
New York Times Service
Toronto

DURING the War of 1812, Americans burned York, the forebear of Toronto, provoking the retaliatory burning of Washington by the British fleet.

In the 1840s, some Americans tried to start wars of national liberation to make Canada part of the United States. During the Civil War, the Confederates used Canada as a sanctuary for raids into Vermont.

Since then, the border has been pretty quiet. But now, in this year of the North American free-trade agreement, Canada is being cast as the post-Cold War enemy of the United States.

Appropriately, the casting is being done by a filmmaker — Michael Moore, best known for his 1989 documentary *Roger and Me*. (In the film, about the troubles in his home town of Flint, Mich., after General Motors closed its plant there and put 30,000 people out of work, Mr. Moore doggedly pursues GM's chairman, Roger Smith, who just as doggedly avoids him.)

Now Mr. Moore is in Toronto to shoot his first commercial-feature film, a satire called *Canadian Bacon*, which is the military code name for a campaign to whip up anti-Canadian hysteria and give back to the United States the enemy it lost when Russia became an ally.

A national security adviser in the mold of Dr. Strangelove (played by the stand-up comedian Kevin Pollak) convinces a well-meaning president that this is the way to get defence industries humming and lift his popularity in an election year, when he's being murdered in the polls.

Grist for this satire is most Americans' lack of knowl-

edge about Canada. While Japan is generally considered the biggest foreign owner of U.S. assets, Canada is actually No. 1, followed by Britain, the Netherlands and then Japan. Polls show that few Americans can name the Canadian prime minister while virtually every Canadian can name the U.S. president.

Mr. Moore, 39, the son of an auto worker, went to Canada in his youth for his "foreign travels." He started writing *Canadian Bacon* during the George Bush administration's 1990 campaign to whip up sentiment for the Persian Gulf war.

"So here was Iraq, an ally of sorts — we'd given Saddam Hussein \$4-billion in aid to fight Iran, and the very next thing he's the enemy," the filmmaker says. "I started thinking, what would be the most absurd example of how the government and the media could convince people to fear and hate? And I thought, well, it's right here, the longest unprotected border in the world, the second-largest country in land mass, after Russia. What do we really know about what they're doing up there, with all that fresh water and all that ice and all those Zamboni machines?" His grin is like a wide-angle lens.

Canadians and Americans are depicted in stereotypes. Americans are shown as aggressive, bombastic, a shade Teutonic, while Canadians are portrayed as polite and peace-loving, always willing to bow to the United States. Jokes target bilingualism. Among "un-American activities" the Canadians find themselves accused of in the movie is eliminating the Miss Canada Pageant.

The plot also benefits from what Mr. Moore calls the "fifth column," the large number of Canadians in the U.S. news and entertainment industry. They include singer **Joni Mitchell**; broadcasters Peter Jennings, Morley Safer and Robert MacNeil; and actors Donald Sutherland, William Shatner and the late Raymond Burr.

"You round up the Arabs as car bombers of the World Trade Center, but how do you round up Canadians?" Mr. Moore asked. "They look like us. They talk like us. They walk among us undetected."

Mr. Jennings, the ABC anchor and, as that network's publicity describes him, the most-watched man in America, is sinisterly identified by an American in the script as the man who "knows who's won our elections before we do, and he doesn't even vote."

In all the nationality-scambling, the Canadian-born John Candy stars as an American, the overzealous, superpatriotic sheriff of Niagara Falls, N.Y., whose mobilization in something called the General Schwarzkopf Shopping Mall helps the president improve his ratings:

His deputy is a gun nut played by Rhea Perlman, best known as Carla the barmaid in *Cheers*, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a loud-mouthed general named Panzer, is played by Rip Torn.

"When we started working on this I thought, well, this is fun because it's so preposterous," said Alan Alda, who plays the harried chief executive. "But the more I do it, the more I think it's not so preposterous. The president never intends to get into any kind of war situation. He gets carried away by events."

Mr. Alda said he had no particular president in mind. "It's a bipartisan takeoff," he said, "a bipartisan knock."

Canadian Bacon, to be released next summer by MGM/UA, is now being shot on location in Toronto. But this is one of the few films where Toronto is actually Toronto, not New York, Cleveland, or Chicago. Most films shoot around the CN Tower. In this one the tower, helicopters swarming around it, is not only visible but crucial to the climax.