During the second week of the Cannes film festival (May 23, to be precise), Cinéma de France's daily festival publication Le Programme appeared containing an article entitled: "Heroux: Cannes 'French Mafia.'" In this article, and later in conversation, Canadian producer Denis Heroux articulated his main complaint about this year's festival and in doing so, he offered the Canadian community here an opportunity to assess its relationship to the festival.

In essence, he expressed his anger over the fact that the festival is controlled by a small group of French people who are hostile to foreigners, and that Canadian films had been ignored by the main competition's selection committee. He accused the committee of lying about the acceptable running time for films to be entered into competition.

Denis Heroux represents the best of Canadian-style production know-how and is, of course, the executive producer of Les Plouffe. However, his remarks were not only the result of his own personal experience: "The French are incapable of understanding that Canada consists of more than just Quebec. This is a vintage year for Canadian cinema, especially English Canada - after years of junk. Ask festival director Gilles Jacob why there are no Canadian films in the competition. He must know, since he represents film and writing at John Abbott College..."

Kevin Tierney

Critics for L'Humanité Dimanche, Samuel Lachize talks shop with Gilles Carle and Roger Lemelin (L.)

No one else does."

Although Heroux was the most open about his attitude, he was certainly not alone. His remarks had been formulated during the first week of the festival, particularly when Les Plouffe was screened. Although the film didn't sweep the French critics off their feet (a peculiar bunch they are, too): so determined were they to show up their American counterparts, they were writing favorably about Heaven's Gate before it was screened, audience response was very strong and additional screenings were added. Certainly there weren't many people complaining it was too long, having seen a new version with a running time of three hours and twenty minutes. The story of the selection committee's decision not to look at films with running times of longer than two hours and ten minutes is the kind of story that gains with each telling. It was the number one topic of conversation at a beach lunch in honor of Les Plouffe hosted by the Canadian government representatives in Cannes. Cinema Canada (no relation: it's actually the Film Festival's Bureau which is attached to the Ministry of Communications) Les Plouffe was chosen to open the Directors' Fortnight section of the festival and, because of that, was given official treatment. Unfortunately everyone involved with the film had hoped to see it entered in the main competition.

According to Jacqueline Brodie of the Film Festival's Bureau, Gilles Jacob refused to view the four hour version of Les Plouffe because he would not entertain any version that was longer than two hours and ten minutes. The inference was that the selection committee was eliminating longer films this year, although, in fact, it was to choose at least three films that ran longer (including Claude Lelouch's latest chapter in a lifetime pursuit of ambiguity, Les uns et les autres with a running time of three hours). Based on Jacob's 'suggestion,' Gilles Carle cut a new version of Les Plouffe to two hours and fifteen minutes, but it didn't satisfy him, nor Jacob and the selection committee, and after a screening, it was turned down.

The net result of all these discussions left both the producers and the press, with the feeling that the festival wasn't being totally honest in its application of an acceptable running time guideline and soon everyone was talking about a two hour and ten minute 'rule' that applied only to Les Plouffe.

Who is Gilles Jacob and why is he doing this? To answer this question, journalists from La Presse, Le Journal de Montréal, Le Devoir et Cinema Canada decide to leave the lunch for Les Plouffe and find Jacob. Although none of us expect to see him right away, we are ushered into his office after submitting our names and those of the papers we represent.

It's a spacious office and his desk looks as if it hadn't been touched for a couple of weeks, his back to a splendid view of the Mediterranean and La Croisette, three stories above Le Palais du Festival where the films in competition are showcased and where the tourists gather in the street to watch for stars.

Jacob greets us formally but is cordial: first and foremost, a good politician - although I suspect the sense of the French word most often used to describe him, 'un tacticien,' is a better one. We're promised to ask him only one question and that has to do with the time 'rule,' but more to the point is why wasn't Les Plouffe accepted by the committee? His argument: defense centres around length and history: Carle's Fantastica opened last year's festival and didn't do itself or the festival any good; there wasn't a 'rule' about running time as much as there was a guideline. He felt he was helping Les Plouffe by not accepting it because long films cause people to walk out and early departures aren't good for any film. He gets more vague as he goes along. Ultimately, he says he is pleased that Les Plouffe was invited by La Quinzaine because it's a valuable lesson in humility to give one's place in this 'other important section.'

Jacob is in the style of Giscard d'Estaing: cultivated, articulate, aloof and cold. He doesn't use the word 'politics' in his discussion of how films are chosen, but it is tacit in all of his

Kevin Tierney is a freelance writer in Montreal who teaches film and writing at John Abbott College.
remarks: Canada should grow up and realize its place in the world market. 

A mere surface change... At least let the festival decide if it wants to stay international or become what it already is: a sick festival for locals.

...the task of changing the festival's attitude towards English Canadian films has fallen to Jean Lefebvre and Jacqueline Brodie... who operate Canada's Film Festivals Bureau...

To some veterans of this festival, like Gerald Pratley, the director of the Ontario Film Institute — and more than a passive observer of the emergence of Canadian films has given his 15 years of festival attendance — Canadians in general and Heroux in particular, have reacted to or reacted childhood. While he agrees that this year's films are much improved over those of previous years, he blames English Canadian producers for not learning from past experiences. He says: 'I've been a producer, my one priority for three years now and if this year's festival is a failure, that's what I've been doing.' He has even gone as far as to say that the festival's politics, the unique make-up of the English Canadian filmmaking aesthetic, is something that the producers should be concerned about.

Canada's other participant in La Quinaine is Rollin Thomas, and an even more difficult situation. Thomas has been organizing his own screenings and has a number of his crew are interested in the festival. He says: 'It's not a question of being here with what we're all here to do, self-publicity...'

Despite the success of his film 'The L.A. Film Market was a clear warning to Cannes but it doesn't seem to have lowered the profile of Cannes.'

'Cannes but it doesn't seem to have lowered the profile of Cannes.'

The Cannes Film Festival is a production of the Film Institute and the Festival's attitude towards English Canadian films has fallen to Jean Lefebvre and Jacqueline Brodie, who operate Canada's Film Festivals Bureau and the Cannes arms of the operation, Cinema Canada. In fact, it has been a year of events that at least potentially change the unique make-up of the English Canadian filmmaking aesthetic — an aesthetic they are both convinced to be emerging.

Frankly, I wonder about that. In a film like Heartaches — a film which I quite like, there is a subtle but obvious attempt to not locate the film in a particular space: geography is never mentioned. I'm going to the country, I'm going to see the world, it's never mentioned. American cigarettes and pay the rent for her apartment with American money. Even though we are Toronto-based, the backdrop, it's never mentioned. Remember what gave Gone with the Wind its strength? By Design is equally nowhere, and Improper Channels is consciously American. If content is being so consciously neutralized, can any unique aesthetic be seen emerging?