Jean Lefebvre: Yes. As a matter of fact the whole idea of the Board's participation in film festivals originated with one person: Lucille Bishop. Years ago at the Film Board she used to be a distribution agent, and she was very interested in the critical, the qualitative side of film. The NFB was involved in countless film festivals around the world and people used to dump the invitations on her desk saying, "You figure a way out of it." So, she did that for maybe three or four years and then was transferred to Paris. And I kind of got the job.

By then of course the NFB had figured out that it might be a full-time job. But I had no secretary, nothing... so for a few years I went around selecting NFB films, begging the filmmakers to lend me their own prints of their films. I'd do the wrapping, the shipping, the customs forms myself, I'd bang out my own letters... Then I'd go after little budgets, on a festival-by-festival basis, to be able to do it. Out of that grew a sense that the NFB should have a film festivals bureau. And miraculously, in one boom year I managed to obtain a secretary. Through the NFB's mandate, the film commissioner being in charge of cinematography, we evolved into the body that was responsible for pre-selecting the Canadian films that would represent Canada at Cannes. Those were wonderful years!

We used to have a committee of 10 members to select, out of three feature films, which ones would go - if any. In that particular selection our jurisdiction extended beyond the NFB. At the same time the Canadian film industry was developing, particularly in Montreal. It was mostly NFB 'drop-outs' that were making films. Gilles Carle was doing a little film on the side, Claude Jutra... a lot of people were. So there was still a pretty close link between the Film Festivals Bureau and these people.

In about 1970/71 Gerard Pelletier, who later became a very important figure in this industry, was appointed to the Film Festivals Bureau under the Department of Communications. It was mostly NFB 'drop-outs' that were making films. Gilles Carle was doing a little film on the side, Claude Jutra... a lot of people were. So there was still a pretty close link between the Film Festivals Bureau and these people.

One point the NFB decided that we could be better for the development of my career if I branched out into something else, and I'd just about had it with pursuing budgets and that sort of thing. So I decided to become an NFB distributor.

Jean Lefebvre: It was then Secretary of State, announced that he was going to develop a comprehensive program, in a concerted way, of the distribution of Canadian films in Canada and abroad. We were up to about 16 members and historically it was enormous. Also, we realized that we were at the Bureau had a certain feel for what a festival is looking for. But we don't want to be alone in making the decision. So we said, let's limit the pre-selection committee, since the only part in the Cannes festival that requires pre-selection is the competition itself, not the Director's Fortnight or the critics' film week.

Jean Lefebvre: No. The change in composition did not reflect those changes in policies. The only reason behind our limiting the number of people on the pre-selection committee was a practical one: the committee had become totally unmanageable. We were up to about 16 members and historically it was enormous. Also, we realized that we were at the Bureau had a certain feel for what a festival is looking for. But we don't want to be alone in making the decision. So we said, let's limit the pre-selection committee, since the only part in the Cannes festival that requires pre-selection is the competition itself, not the Director's Fortnight or the critics' film week.

Jean Lefebvre: In other words, have we made a sort of demarcation saying the competition is for the producers and money people?

Jean Lefebvre: Yes, in terms of the influence that these have over that selection. For instance, you may...
have four producers in there, and some of them may have had directing experience, but obviously the way they screen films will be different from the way directors work. Is that an imbalance in favor of producers?
Jean Lefebvre: I don't think so. The producers we have this year were very different from the way they work. Some of them were very involved in the cultural promotion, the overall image of the Canadian cinema, as opposed to dealing with the nuts and bolts and having to do it simultaneously. "Don't miss the latest author's new movie, we got a $10 million film for you to see!"

Cinema Canada: There are as many festivals as there are days in a year. Your other committee, the grant committee, must decide which of the many festivals that you support has a policy, with mutual agreement Quebec for example, of funding only those festivals supported or approved by the provincial film agencies.

Jean Lefebvre: No, not really. The contribution of grants to film festivals in Canada follows several stages. Once we have representatives in the provinces in which the festivals will be taking place, we will have representatives from the Federal, Quebec, and Ontario, representatives from Alberta and that sort of thing. Now, these people who sit on the committee and do participate in the discussion, only don't vote. It gives us and them a comprehensive picture, not only of the criteria we give them, but also of our priorities and their priorities with regard to the festivals taking place in the province under their jurisdiction. It allows our grants to be considered as to whether an application is accepted to create duplicate programming in some areas. The other people sitting on the committee are the representatives of the federal interests that are also approached by festivals for financing. External Affairs, Canada Council, National Film Board, Quebec film etc. They are the voting members.

Cinema Canada: What if a festival came to you from Quebec, let's say, without other funding and without the support of its provincial institute?

Jean Lefebvre: We would look very seriously. Quebec representatives, if we have received any funding from the granting authority of its own province of the necessity of its existing festival, and that this is the provincial film agency that would refuse to fund a festival that is in line or that reflects the necessities of the filmmaking industry. So, if a festival comes to us for pre-selection and does not have the support of its provincial institute, we will not consider it. We will not vote on it.

Cinema Canada: Is there a festival that can be come to us from Quebec, let's say, without other funding and without the support of its provincial institute?

Jean Lefebvre: We would look very seriously. Quebec representatives, if we have received any funding from the granting authority of its own province of the necessity of its existing festival, and that this is the provincial film agency that would refuse to fund a festival that is in line or that reflects the necessities of the filmmaking industry. So, if a festival comes to us for pre-selection and does not have the support of its provincial institute, we will not consider it. We will not vote on it.

Cinema Canada: Did the committee feel that this had infringed upon its mandate?

Jean Lefebvre: No, it knew the context. And also, we are getting to the point where we have some festivals that are there.

Cinema Canada: What is the Bureau's annual budget?

Jean Lefebvre: We get $350,000 (as of this year) which is exclusively for grants to Canadian film festivals, plus another $50,000 which is the Bureau's operational budget... for sending filmmakers all over to festivals, sending over 1,000 films to over 160 festivals, organizing the pre-selection committee meetings, publishing the Cinema Canada yearbook, our directory... Every year we ask for $100,000 more for the grants budget for next year, but I'm 96% sure that we will not get it. Money's too tight. But we keep coming back with the same arguments every year because in general the situation is always the same; there's not enough money for film festivals. You could not organize one festival on $350,000 let alone give the major grants to 12 film festivals as we are doing right now.

Cinema Canada: Are you the major grant giver then?

Jean Lefebvre: Well, not in terms of money, but in terms of guaranteeing to the provinces that this particular festival is helping us, and guaranteeing to participants from abroad that the government is interested. Also, by the mere fact that we do give money to these festivals, External Affairs may be prompted to step in and help a little bit. The National Film Festival Bureau has done its homework. It creates a sort of credibility for the festivals. It also allows them to go to other countries for special events and say that the government is interested in us as a non-profit organization, would you be interested in helping us? And they say yes, and that's still the key grant.

But if we're really going to have a serious overall involvement in this sort of thing, we would need a million. Also, we should be given permission to invest not only in the festivals but in the services that we insist filmmakers need to develop the film industry.

Unfortunately, the very existence of the Festival Bureau is a luxury of sorts. That's not going to happen. We understand and sympathize with. Which doesn't make my life any easier!
Cinema Canada: Let's presume that I've made my own film, I'm lacking confidence, I really don't know the ropes. I'm a filmmaker not a business person and I'm chaotically lost. What in fact can you do to help me?

Jean Lefebvre: A lot of filmmakers send us their films and ask for our advice on how to get distribution. We in the Department of Development, try to do whatever we can, if we have the knowledge to do that. So, because of that, the majority - 98% of the films - come to us.

The only ones that don't really come to us are the paranoid ones; the ones who say, they're government, they must be getting their way, they must be doing it their way. They call their little friends and arrange film screenings between them, etc. But to a certain extent, they're working against themselves, giving themselves...

The films we are interested in are the ones that have been submitted to the festivals, the ones that have been selected by major festivals. What we are primarily interested in is the promotion of the filmmaker of a given film, because by his presence he will generate a lot of copy, not only about his film but also about the filmmaker and the film company. So we try to send a filmmaker there where we are not entitled to give grants, or that is, travel grants. We have to look at other possibilities, that is, under contract, to do publicity for the Canadian film industry. So we go downstairs to Contracts and Administration and they say, well you didn't put out a call for tender... Well, there is a call for tenders because we do have to be very heaven and if the government...

Cinema Canada: And if it's a good film, would you assume that you can assume some of the risk for the film company?

Jean Lefebvre: Any film that is eligible for a festival, that is sent to us with the festival entry form, the documentation, etc., we will ship for the filmmaker anywhere in the world except North America. I'd like to see filmmakers take advantage of this service. Sometimes we make a trip and do something for them, but it is not the same as the government. We're not a government service but we try to deal with them on an equal footing. It's a three-month deal, with memos to everybody explaining why we need film cans, etc. Now try to imagine this particular situation when you're preparing the Canadian participation at Cannes: It's an exercise in visiting Kafka's castle. It's absolutely incredible! And when we do, finally, get to the end of the Cannes film festival, we normally sit down and say, not, 'Boy, are we glad we've had a good year,' or a bad year; our real impression is, 'Boy, are we glad we managed to get the budget in time, our submittions to the Treasury Board in time,' so that we could throw the little beach party for the press to promote a Canadian film that has been selected. That's a major victory.

Cinema Canada: If you do, the logical answer is, 'How do you know, you've never made a movie?' But I do know, I've been 15 years in festivals. Still, we're working with a lot of paranoiacs and too much. Lately we've been telling people quite fairly, honestly, what we think, but the电影节tors, we leave open the fact that we may be wrong, that there's nothing we'd love more than to be wrong. And we have been.

Cinema Canada: And in addition to that shipping service, do you provide tutoring or dubious?

Jean Lefebvre: No, we purchase, for use in film festivals, certain films which fall under very clearly defined policy areas. For example, if a feature has been selected by a major festival like Cannes, Venice, Berlin, etc., and subsequently garnered enough invitations so as to monopolize the print for three months more than its participation in that major festival, then we buy a print for festival use. We write it in the other way around, that is, it is the country and the print remains in our possession. It is strictly for use in festivals and it is never shown without obtaining prior permission from the agency, because he or she is the person who holds the rights for the festival. And if you have 1,000 films last year, they would have trouble getting distribution. It hurts. It touches upon the reason why international films tend to be popular in some European countries because they reflect aspects of Canadian life that are not there. Some films would be bought in carbon copies of American life. It's an insight for them and a cultural learning experience. I don't think we have trouble getting distribution they're fairly well accepted critically. The international films may pick up distribution, often do, and they're seen by much wider audiences. But do the national films ever make their money back, or are they constantly relegated to the fringe? In other words, is there a distribution point of view?

Cinema Canada: Unless you were your own agency.

Jean Lefebvre: Oh, well, that would be too heavenly! And if the government started doing it, I'm sure the loss agencies that the government couldn't even keep track of. Besides, the international countries can say that they have this sort of set-up.

Cinema Canada: How does the unconventional nature of the film industry affect your working within a government department?

Jean Lefebvre: Well, here we are in this huge department whose mandate is primarily to develop policy, a little bit of lobbying, crazy is that we're dealing with very material things - such as shipping films, buying films. There's no space for government bureaucracy, not for doing material things - such as shipping films, buying films... There's a shortage of government bureaucracy for that. We are not interested in a government bureaucracy that is not interested in the production of a film.

We have to look at other possibilities, that is, under contract, to do publicity for the Canadian film industry. So we go downstairs to Contracts and Administration and they say, well you didn't put out a call for tender... Well, there is no call for tenders because it has to be this guy and this guy alone! And they can't figure out that out! And so, that is a problem of many. So we go back up and write a three-page memo why this person is the right person, and we can't find a way to send a filmmaker there where we are not entitled to give grants, or that is, travel grants. We have to look at other possibilities, that is, under contract, to do publicity for the Canadian film industry. So we go downstairs to Contracts and Administration and they say, well you didn't put out a call for tender... Well, there is no call for tenders because it has to be this guy and this guy alone! And they can't figure out that out! And so, that is a problem of many.

Cinema Canada: You were your own agency.

Jean Lefebvre: Well, that question hurts. It touches upon the reason why you're packing an office such as this, so that we will give these films a fighting chance. It's obvious that when you have an über multi-million dollar production that really speaks internationally - I'm thinking of a Fellini or a Bergman - you're right, they get a distribution. It's only through exposure that these films can hope to find money - and not to recoup distribution costs. It's only through exposure that these films can hope to find money - and not to recoup distribution costs. It's only through exposure that these films can hope to find money - and not to recoup distribution costs. It's only through exposure that these films can hope to find money - and not to recoup distribution costs.
Cinema Canada: In contrast to many foreign film festivals, the one in Canada does not represent a certain political persuasion. Cinema Canada appears to be fairly liberal.

Jean Lefebvre: Yes, it's surprisingly liberal. I only once had problems with a film. And not because the film wasn't good—knows it was a marvellous film. I only once had problems with a film. And not because the film wasn't good—knows it was a marvellous film. And not because the film wasn't good—knows it was a marvellous film. And not because the film wasn't good—knows it was a marvellous film.

Our biggest problem in Canada stems from the fact that we're not very politicalized, we're not tuned in or sensitive to, say, the many political viewpoints. For us, the left is being a small "T" liberal. The right is being Reagan. Whereas in Europe the right is being Hitler and the left is being a little more than Communist... Because of this we occasionally get films that are sent out more than incoherent, and the reason is the political sensitivity. I won't try to hide the fact that for example, if you participate in a film festival and the film is going to be analyzed from a political viewpoint. Forget the qualities of your film, it will not be judged from that perspective. If you have a film that designates the West, if you have a film—whether intentionally or not—that makes us look like crooks, they'll select it; if you have a film that makes us look good they won't even select it—or if they do select it they'll show it at a competition in a cinema five miles away.

Cinema Canada: My particular bias is towards the experimental and from other countries, El Salvador and Iran, for example, and they are terribly anti-North American in general.

Jean Lefebvre: In Canada the right is being Hitler and the left is being a little more than Communist—because of this we occasionally get films that are sent out more than incoherent, and the reason is the political sensitivity. I won't try to hide the fact that for example, if you participate in a film festival and the film is going to be analyzed from a political viewpoint. Forget the qualities of your film, it will not be judged from that perspective. If you have a film that designates the West, if you have a film—whether intentionally or not—that makes us look like crooks, they'll select it; if you have a film that makes us look good they won't even select it—or if they do select it they'll show it at a competition in a cinema five miles away.

Cinema Canada: In theory, yes, what about the political perspective?

Jean Lefebvre: Yes, for heaven's sake. Otherwise we would have either a state that is totally "dirigiste"... or a state which could not develop because of a lack of development of the industry. I think that the Canadian approach is a sane one, in that we are "dirigiste" when we develop the home industry, but we don't forget that, but at the same time we're leaving space for creativity. The Canadian government is interested in developing the national film industry, but at the same time we're leaving space for creativity. The Canadian government is interested in developing the national film industry, but at the same time we're leaving space for creativity. The Canadian government is interested in developing the national film industry, but at the same time we're leaving space for creativity.

Jean Lefebvre: Well, this year is our best year ever... From a qualitative point of view I'm just overjoyed by the films this year—films like Heartaches, Ticket to Heaven, etc. It's been a fabulous year. We've never had so many good films. This is really the first year where our pre-selection committee really had to anguish over which films to recommend, because we have a limit of six. And there were a lot more than six that were good. For the first time, we didn't have just a minimum of six films really popping out, we had a lot of good films. And also, this year's production crystallized for us a problem we've been feeling for a long time—English-Canadian films tend to be overlooked by foreign film festivals, because in their minds, these films look "American". This year it really infuriated us because a lot of these films only look "American" and the extent that English Canada is North American, but no more than that.

Take Heartaches for example. We were so furious at Cannes because they liked it, but just not enough. It was close to being selected, but it wasn't. We were very disappointed. My assistant Jacques Farrow and I have given ourselves five years to develop a promotional plan to revalorize, or valorize, in the eyes of foreigners, the English-Canadian cinema. It's been easy for Quebecois films because in the minds of foreigners they don't look American, they don't have any other look. But this year dealing with English-Canadian films there is this very peculiar attitude. I think it stems more from a lack of knowledge than from a negative British approach to foreign film industries do not participate in Moscow or in Leipzig, your film is going to be analyzed from a political perspective. If you have a film that denigrates the West, if you have a film—whether intentionally or not—that makes us look like crooks, they'll select it; if you have a film that makes us look good they won't even select it—or if they do select it they'll show it at a competition in a cinema five miles away.

Jean Lefebvre: Let me put it this way. If I had my druthers—I never will, but if I had—I would like for Toronto and Montreal the next one... They would both get double the amount that is totally "dirigiste"... or a state which could not develop because of a lack of development of the industry. I think that the Canadian approach is a sane one, in that we are "dirigiste" when we develop the home industry, but at the same time we're leaving space for creativity.
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