Naturally enough, the first impulse on receiving the reports of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee (Applebert and Fournier) was to turn to the final redaction d'étude sur le cinéma et l'audiovisuel (Fournier) to make the report recommendations. Those recommendations have the private sector breaking out a bottle of champagne and the public sector reaching for a shotgun. Basically, the recommendations severely curtail the production of films and television programs by public sector agencies such as the CBC, NFB and Radio-Canada. Thus, it is virtually impossible to support projects by independent producers. In making this recommendation, Applebert is trying to solve existing problems in the public sector. What are these problems and will the recommendation in fact solve them? This article attempts to answer that question with respect to the production segment of the film industry.

The second part of the article, in the next issue of Cinema Canada, will deal with distribution.

**Government intervention in culture**

The three introductory chapters of Applebert make up about 25% of the report and provide an important insight into the love-hate relationship which government and culture share in our society. “Government serves the social need for order, predictability and control - seeking consensus, establishing norms, and offering uniformity of treatment. Cultural activity, by contrast, thrives on spontaneity, accepts diversity, disrupts and dissents as natural conditions - and withers if it is legislated or directed.” The problems of government support for culture are clearly articulated, but the report bumbles badly when it attempts to solve these problems. The chapters on film and broadcasting suggest that we must choose a blind man see by giving him a new hat. Although Fournier differs radically in its specific proposals, it similarly gets off to a promising start when discussing the major problems facing the Québec cinema. With regard to the evaluation and promotion of its productions, the English-language cinema in general and the U.S. cinema in particular, it poses the obvious question. “In this francophone islet of barely 5 million people on a continent of 250 million almost exclusively anglophone inhabitants, is it possible to make the same efforts and build on existing mechanisms to ensure that high quality films are produced. “Quality” is a slippery term. The report describes it by using terms such as “cultural value,” “creative” and “innovative.” Quality implies all of those things, but it also has one essential element which both reports skip over. The simple fact is that we can only judge quality when we see the finished product on the screen. Even then we may not be able to define it properly, but we know it when we see it. The reports overlook the fact that it is virtually impossible to establish that a finished film will be creative and innovative from reading the script before it is made. If this is so, then we cannot base government intervention on the mechanisms suggested in the report such as agencies and committees which listen to ideas, read scripts and then decide whether to support projects.

Applebert’s notion of a shared adventure between artist and audience in which the quality of the exchange is more important than the “ sheer size” of the audience. Fournier describes a similar adventure. A film’s creative team uses a “harmony of image and sound” to communicate something “so pleasing, so beautiful and so important that the audience will forgive home and piggy-bank just to share it. Both reports are therefore placing a premium on quality; of the artist; of the audience’s creative work; of the audience and of the communication between artist and audience. This decision to focus on quality as the prime objective of government intervention in culture is of central importance to the film industry. There may be government support for production to meet other objectives, but it is not the central issue.

**Judging quality**

Having established the guiding principle for government intervention in film and broadcasting, the reports run into trouble when they try to develop mechanisms to ensure that high quality films are produced. Applebert believes that, “the role of the creative artists should be given a special priority.” Cultural policy should recognize the creative drive of artists as the essential ingredient of culture. This meshes with a similar conviction expressed by Fournier: “The Québec cinema will take its place in the concerns of man through creativity, the most daring innovation and the timeliness of its themes.” In other words, we want to support films which, above all else, are creative and innovative and don’t simply mimic what has been done before.

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**Part I: The logic behind government aid to production**

by John Roston

**The sense and nonsense of Applebert & Fournier**

** proposals and Applebaum and Fournier are not happy with the quality of what they support Committees tend to approve projects which satisfy a number of different tastes and points of view - not very encouraging for those innova-
THE NFB'S WINTER CAMPAIGN

An interview with James Domville, government film commissioner

by Michael Dorland

On the morning of Tuesday, Nov. 16 - the day the Applebaum-Hebert report was made public - the National Film Board, in a surprise move, welcomed the committee's call for a total revamp of the government film agency as "very creditable and credible."

Though the NFB was the first major cultural agency to respond to Applebert, the initial promise to take its recommendations as positively as possible had already worn somewhat thin one month later. Indeed, the Board would appear to have dug in firmly to wage a long campaign against what an internal document describes as the "culturally bankrupt" Applebert recommendations.

At the Board's Montreal headquarters a temporary office has been set up to house the Applebert-Hebert Working Group. This six-man committee will coordinate the Board's formal response to the minister of labor, Industry, and the subject of Applebert. Scheduled for late December, that document will be only one of a range of reactions to be used to transmit the NFB position to the government. Other means will include calling upon staff, individuals, friends of the Board and organizations that have worked with the NFB to vocalize their opposition to the dire consequences for Canadian culture that would result from the implementation of Applebert.

Leading the Board's counter-attack is government film commissioner James Domville. Sipping on a Coke, Domville unveiled the grand strategy of the winter campaign.

"The recommendations are so extreme that they risk creating a fortress mentality," Domville told Cinema Canada. "If the purpose was renewal it would have been much more helpful for them to say that and to give the direction of that renewal and discuss it with the people concerned."

I'm basically trying to tell everybody 'Hey, that doesn't mean we're not going hell-bent for leather for our own renewal.' Of course one tries to make the Applebert thing as positive as possible. We're saying 'Okay, let's at least make this accelerate our timetable.' But you've got to remember what they're saying in their text that we don't need a film board at all. Well, that doesn't stimulate renewal, that stimulates massive resistance. That's violent overkill - even more, in a way, than with the CBC recommendations.

Renewal is a word one hears often from Domville. It is the word he would probably like to see as the synonym for his term as government film commissioner which began in 1980. And one of the paradoxical consequences of Applebert is that is has acted as a stimulus to that very spirit of renewal that Domville associates with his mandate as head of what he, on the other hand, does admit is "a big bureaucracy."

That is not the only paradox. A keen supporter of the idea of a...
cultutral review committee - cultural development in this country should be dealt with in the same breath as your energy policy, foreign posture and your economic policy; that is, as a continuing dossier in cabinet - Donville finds himself in what he terms a "quandary" over Applebert.

"I find myself at the same time rejecting every recommendation to do with film and broadcasting in their specifics, yet endorsing many of the principles announced in Chapter Two," he says. As Donville sees them, those principles are four: the primacy of culture for its own sake; the concentration on the individual artist as the fountainhead of our cultural goodies; the concern for access by the Canadian public to our cultural creations; and the articulation of the arts of the length principle that distinguishes between the making of intellectual property and the government of the day.

"It's very difficult to understand how Applebert got from there to a number of their practical recommendations since they do analyze the film scene in quite valid terms. At the heart of Donville's rejection of the Applebert recommendations lies the still unclarified nature of public-private sector limits. If strictly applied, Applebert's recommendation to take both the CBC and the NFB out of production would effectively silence Canada's public sector voices; at any rate, such is the threatening perception seen by the Board. The paradox is heightened by the fact that, as Donville puts it, the private sector has "been making other people's Grade B movies and been failures at it, culturally, economically and fundamentally.""

Yet he continues, "having recognized the problems, what Applebert is saying is more of the same. Their concentration on the commercial entertainment film seems to blindly ignore every other change and departure from old policy in the Film Board's report, and they're inferring that there's no renewal at all and it's still the status quo from the '60s at the Board. Well, one of the major changes we've made which would have been thought of as extremely radical a few years ago is our policy of coproducing feature films with independent producers in the country, but using our resources to coproduce those scripts we think are good, scripts that are authentically revealing of this country. That's why we're up to our necks in the coproduction of Gabrielle Roy's Tin Plate; that's why we coproduced The Wars and that we are currently coproducing with certain important films that try to counterbalance an image of this country which is pretty strange - and these are films that never got off the ground unless you put together all the possibilities available in this country. I mean the state bank, independent skills and know-how, private investors, the public sector pre-sale or coproduction possibilities on the networks - and independent skills and resources of the National Film Board. I don't think I know goddamn well The Wars could not have been put together without the Film Board."

"I'm hoping that with some "consolidation" of existing production and distribution companies, a happy balance can be found; more Film Board enterprises can produce material in quantity more economically than the private sector. Quantity production has a particular importance in the Quebec context. Fournier bemoans the dominance of American films and television programs in Quebec and refers to the undeniable bond which today unites the cinema and national identity." Quebec is not the only province with a large percentage of its film production in English. Fournier's theme of national identity is much the same as Applebert's. He's got a headache, so we'll give him a transfusion. So they pump the blood, a bit into the Public Archives, a little to CBC, a little here and there, and the patients survive."

"What happens now is that, in a little more coherent form, what I've just been saying is going to be convolved to the government. "It's not enough to say Applebert is all wet and that they've missed the boat. We're going to be found unaccountable, not just in terms of articulating our role within the total creative film scene but also in saying those things for which we have been found unaccountable and have been counted within any federal government policy to do with film."

"I think this board needs an alternative is to try to establish such an organization."

"And it's only in round two that we're going to get people concerned with the life of the Board."

"That's probably close to a declaration war against us. One thing's for sure: there's no production in this Film Board version of The Wars, their budget allocation. All of them would be given adequate compensation instead of job security. Responsibilities of the CFDC and executive producers would have to be clearly defined, but it might just work. The alternative is to try to establish such an organization in the private sector, where both reports believe that creative risks can best be taken.

The private sector

Fournier admits that large and medium-size companies in the private sector have their problems. Their "very size, their well-intentioned bureaucratic nightmares, their lack of imagination and productivity, the tendencies to protect themselves, to minimize risks, to tone down some of their boldness, to consider so many possible systems on creativity." On the other hand small production houses, while ready to take a little, lack financial stability. Fournier hopes that with some "consolidation" of existing production and distribution companies, a happy balance can be found; more Film Board enterprises can produce material in quantity more economically than the private sector.
funding has already come their way. Applebert would apparently keep executive producers at the CBC, but their actual production work would be done by the private sector. If one is to hold an executive producer responsible for the quality of the finished program, one cannot give him or her only partial control over the production of that program. Sooner or later one is bound to find executive producers accusing some of the private sector contractors of harming quality by cutting corners to increase profitability.

Applebert falls into the trap which has plagued the CFDC for so long when it states: "Good films can also be profitable ones." That is literally true, but it also implies that one can pursue both quality and profitability equally. In fact, sooner or later they conflict and one must be chosen over the other. Applebert was on stronger ground earlier when he asserted that film policy should be "motivated by cultural goals and only secondarily by industrial or commercial ones."

The private sector must make profitability its prime objective if it is to survive. Government intervention can help. Applebert recommends continuing the Capital Cost Allowance and Fourreau recommends boosting it to 150%. The 150% CCA is an Australian invention and has been credited with making possible the high-quality feature films which have been so well-received around the world. In fact, the 150% provision was only passed very recently at a time when the Australian film industry seemed to be slowing down and looking for a hit. The CCA is a good idea, but it falls into the category of industrial and commercial incentives. CFDC grants should be used to encourage cultural goals such as quality. However, if direct government subsidies are provided to potentially unprofitable high-quality projects, these projects must always be treated as a sideline by the private sector. To do otherwise is to make a crucial conditional on continued subsidies - a most dangerous situation for the private sector. In a few cases, the private sector can excel at quality production, but they must be created as a sideline. However, when one looks for the single-mindedness of purpose necessary for the taking of creative risks, one must ask whether the obstacles to be tackled in the private sector do not exceed those to be overcome in the public sector.

Conclusion

None of this should be taken to infer that executive producers and creative artists must work in one sector or the other. They should be able to work in both. It is a question of what their main preoccupation will be while they are working in a particular sector. The private sector preoccupation must be with profit and this generally means an emphasis on quantity rather than quality. The transition from one sector to the other should be as smooth and unobstructed as an opportunity for renewal, to stir up the waters, to change mental attitudes. Our potential is incredible - not just to make great films but to make many great films, in a very long period of time. Ideally, one would hope that if government aid to production puts an emphasis on quality, this would eventually create an environment in which increased quantity is encouraged. The distribution segment of the industry is crucial if it is to happen. Both Applebert and Fournier have a great deal to say about this, and their comments will be examined in the next issue of Cinema Canada.

CFDC view of industry

short-term fix. You can't create and write important stories instantly, on command. W.O. Mitchell, Margaret Atwood or Margaret Laurence represent a lifetime of learning and producing. In short, the critics of the Film Board are based on a lack of understanding of that very principle. Perhaps there are other Norman MacLaren there who need a place where they can create and produce. The CFDC does not wish to see the Board done away with, and if it would most Canadians, Silcox thinks.

What he does find appropriate in the Applebert report is the wish to allow the private sector to have a chance to produce good cultural programming. But it is wrong, he believes, to perceive the private sector as one solely interested in the production of commercial films. Nevertheless, he sees no real incentives in the report that would help the private sector move toward the cultural area.

"It's not so sophisticated as I would like it to be," he comments, referring to the film chapter whose "constricted view" fails to come to grips with the very real problems of the industry.

"The report recommends that the capital cost allowance or some equivalent should be continued to encourage private capital in film. You can't use just one regulatory instrument to encourage the industry. You need a number of instruments which are sensitive to the industry itself." The CCA was fine, he concedes, but only with the production end of the business. "It didn't look at the complete cycle from production to post-production, to distribution and exhibition, to sales in other markets which return to the producer. You need incentives or encouragement in each of those areas if you're going to develop an integral and well-articulated industry. You can't shoe it all in one end like the Kulturbusbarg. It isn't like that.

In the light of the actual federal context and an imminent federal film policy, on which staffs and task forces at the department of Communications have been busy since last spring, the Applebert report, in his opinion, doesn't do much to advance the debate. Take distribution, for instance. "The report makes a fairly generalized, motherhood statement: Extending loans, which we're already doing, doesn't solve the problem. There are other ways of getting distribution problems, but that takes a large, industrial strategy. The film chapter just doesn't come to grips with what film is in our society. It bites off these little chunks, like the CFDC and the Film Board, but it doesn't provide a context for a film policy for the country."

Communications minister Francis Fox has been working on a film policy, and that policy may or may not reflect the views of the Applebert committee. In Silcox's view, that committee offers "no convincing arguments as to either changing priorities or reallocating funds within the general area."

The CFDC, he says, hopes to do better. Currently, it is preparing a response to the Applebert report. Believing that the CFDC should enjoy a budget similar to that of the Board, Silcox says the private sector wishes more activity in all areas, and would not support the dismantling of the NFB. The CFDC report, he hopes, will be "a major determinant in the film policy. We are trying to provide a better context [for such a policy] than Applebert-Hébert seemed to do."

Certainly, as the major beneficiary of a report which, otherwise, he faults down the line, Silcox and the CFDC are under an obligation to provide a more convincing context in which to see the Applebert recommendations about the film corporation become law.