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 recommendations at the back— the bottom line. Those recommendations severely curtail the production of films and television programs by public sector agencies such as the CBC, NFB and Radio-Canada. Naturally enough, the first impulse on news operations, the CBC should relinquish all television production activities and businesses in favour of acquiring its television programming material from 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.

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 treat ment. Cultural activity, by contrast, thrives on spontaneity, creativity, the unexpected, disorder and dissent as natural conditions— and withers if it is legislated or directed.” The problems of government support for culture are clearly articulated, but the report stumbles badly when it attempts to solve those problems. The chapters on film and broadcasting suggest that for the cultural system to work, it is necessary to make a blind man see by giving him a new hat.

Although Fournier differs radically in its specific recommendations, it similarly gets off to a promising start when discussing the major problems facing the Quebec cinema. With regard to the cultural domination of the system, the report says: “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 human and financial investments necessary to aspire to play his game?” Unfortunately, like Applebert, the Fournier report also makes a wrong turn and winds up recommending such extensive and complex government intervention in the film industry that it creates as many problems as it solves.

The sense and nonsense of Applebert & Fournier

Part I: The logic behind government aid to production

by John Roston

that it creates as many problems as it solves.

The prime objective

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 messes with a similar conviction expressed by Fournier: “The Quebec 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.

Applebert’s notion is 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 “charmoy of image and sound” to communicate something “so pleasing, so beautiful and so important that the audience will forgo home and piggy-bank just to share it.

Both reports are therefore placing a premium on quality; of the artist of the artist’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. “Quality” is a slippery term. The reports describe 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 reports such as agencies and committees which listen to ideas, read scripts and then decide whether to support projects.

Applebert recommends that, “The Canadian Film Development Corporation should have its role and budget substantially enlarged so that it may take bolder initiatives in financing Canadian film and video productions on the basis of their cultural value and professional quality.” As part of its decision-making process, the CFDC is to be “drawing consistently on the advice of a broad and varied range of film professionals.” In short, filmmakers should have their proposals judged by a committee of their peers.

Fournier sets up “La Société d’aide au cinéma” to be run by a five-person committee whose members are not necessarily creative artists and who have their proposals judged by a committee of their peers. The executive producer need not be exceptional or the executive producer need not be exceptional or the financial potential of the projects is not to be considered and the juries are to be a part of the decision-making process.

The fact is that we have mechanisms now which use committees to judge proposals and Applebaum and Fournier are not happy with the quality of what they support. Committees tend to approve projects which satisfy more of different tastes and points of view— not very encouraging for those innova tive filmmakers who want to take creative risks on the leading edge of film production.

The evaluation of quality is essentially a retrospective activity. It can only be done objectively with a finished film. This explains what is really happening when those agencies and committees consider proposals. They look backward rather than forward. They check to see if “established” people are involved in the project. Frequently, “you’re only as good as your last film.”

Fournier seems to sense a problem, but winds up institutionalizing this backward look as part of the mechanisms which it sets up. Some programs administered by the Société d’aide au cinéma make selective grants to reward high quality productions. In addition, a second government corporation aids production by making grants automatically to producers, directors, screenwriters based on such things as the box office receipts of the finished film. These grants help filmmakers who have had an innovative commercially successful film make more films. One must ask whether these very complex mechanisms will primarily benefit those willing to give some risks on the leading edge of film production. Unfortunately, creativity and innovation are not necessarily the exclusive province of established filmmakers and those whose last production was a hit. Some people take time to develop and make a lot of garbage before they do creative adventures. Others have one good film in them and thereafter, really ought to be asked to leave. Still others seem to have a way of making a lot of garbage before they do one good film. There is no accounting for it.

If none of the mechanisms suggested in the two reports put the aid where we want it when we want it there, what other option is there? The point is that the question of whether a particular proposal has that magic combination of the right people with the right idea at the right time can only be answered intuitively in the imagination of a single individual. The best intuition will not be correct every time. Therefore we should appoint a number of individuals, or executive producers, who must be given a substantial budget (in the millions of dollars) and complete authority to approve a fixed number of projects and oversee their production. The government agencies and committees can then develop mechanisms to evaluate the finished products. If the overall quality is not exciting, they can have creative executive producer and give someone else a chance. Since these productions must be exceptional or the executive producer is automatically out. A bonus of having the executive producer’s incentive to seek them out the best ideas and people whether the latter be long established in the film industry or completely unknown. The executive producer need
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 committee's final 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 creditable."

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 Applebaum-Hebert Working Group. This six-man committee will coordinate the Board's formal response to the minister of films and in 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 letters, staff, 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 C. Silcox. Slipping 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 busy 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 more timelines.' But you've got to remember what they're saying in their text is that we don't need a film board at all. Well, that doesn't stimulate renewal, that stimulates massive resistance. That's violent overthrow, 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 it has already工作作风 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

THE CFDC VIEW OF APPLERERT

The film industry as a Strasbourg goose

by Connie Tadros

The Canadian Film Development Corporation can hardly be upset with the Applebaum-Hebert report which recommended that the CFDC be substantially enlarged "so that it may take hold initiatives..." and it isn't. As David Silcox, president of the corporation and its sole spokesman concerning the report, sums it up, "the report is very good because it acknowledges that the CFDC should become larger and do more for the private sector."

But that's where the praise ends. Although the report suggests infusing the CFDC with additional funds, these would simply be used to allow the corporation to fulfill its present mandate. "We would be able to do more in video and short films than the CFDC report contains this same fallacy. It's regrettable," says Silcox. Two thousand and certified shorts were produced in 1981. He comments, pointing to the obvious edge which this sector has gained in the international marketplace. With the coming of pay-TV, Silcox would have wished the report had dealt more adequately with the entire industry.

For instance, he notes that no mention is made of the state of the feature sector following the boom and bust of the capital cost allowance era. In the report, the assumption is that the privatization of the production sector would solve the problems of big bureaucracies like the National Film Board and the CBC. "Big organizations like those can always be run more productively," he admits, but this is not to say that the private sector could easily absorb their staffs and functions. Confident that the private sector could potentially do the job of program production, Silcox suggests that "absorbing a very large shift of resources into the private sector could be a very positive thing."

Fundamentally, the report does not deal with the nature of the production done in the public sector. "There is no
Film Board counter-attacks

Applebert

change and departure from old policy in the Film Board's recommendations, 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 the 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 Wages of Fear. And it's clear that certain important films that try to counter-balance 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, independently held 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 could say very well that the Wages could not have been put together without the Film Board."

Ultimately, Domville says, "the biggest disappointment in the whole film section is that all these recommendations don't address one film or one audio-visual creation...." "If one thinks the central problem, in the era of the total proliferation of signals and audio-visual consumption, that our only defence as a nation is not to put up barriers - and we're not the sort of country that can do that - but instead to add to the volume of high-quality programs that people will want to watch, that gives the wrong advice. That's going to give our creators a real chance to express themselves, all those recommendations don't address themselves to that question, which is far beyond the Film Board's role."

All these measures don't address themselves to that or to the question of responding to the fragmentation of dealing in private sector terms - all it's done is rearrange the players on the board and I haven't attacked any of the systemic problems.

"If we have sins let's cure the patient. They're taking the patient and saying 'there's nothing wrong, 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 patient dies."

"What happens now is that, in a little more coherent from what I've just been saying is getting to be conveyed to the government.

"It's not enough to say Applebert is all wet and that they've missed the boat. The question is going to be how we go in a reasonable and responsible way to make use of the opportunity."

The private sector

Fournier advises that "the review of the Film Board is an opportunity to review the whole system of production grants discussed earlier. Fournier recommends that a new "Régie du cinéma et de la vidéo" be given considerable funding and sweeping powers to regulate production and distribution in the private sector. Producers would be required to take a percentage of the volume of film and television production to counter the threat to national identity posed by imports. In fact, Fournier says, any public support for film enterprises can produce material in quantity more economically than the public 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 filmmakers have "one or two producers, a happy balance can be struck between productivity imperatives, the tendency to protect themselves, to minimize risks, to tone down some of their boldness."

Finally, there are four: the primacy of culture for its own sake; the concentration on the central French film and English filmmaking problem is thus-and-so and these are the measures that you take..., "Donville points out."

In specific recommendations - from reorganizing community film distribution to farming out sponsored film production - Applebert charges Domville, "in either talking of a view of the Film Board of 10 years ago or are unaware of the developments of the last few years."

And on other topics - such as the Board's positive impact on regional filmmaking - Applebert is "noticeably silent." One of its biggest sins is that they totally ignore the problems of a dual language country. There's no mention of a vision which says "The central English filmmaking problem is thus-and-so and the central French filmmaking problem is thus-and-so and these are the measures that you take," Domville says.

"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 blithely ignore every other form of audiovisual expression.' "

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fundng 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 her or him 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 Fournier recommends boosting it to 150%. The 150% CCA is an Australian invention and has been credited with making possible the high-quality feature films that 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 industry-stimulating incentives. CFDC grants should be used to encourage cultural goals such as quality. However, if direct government subsidies are provided to exclusively unprofitable high quality projects, these projects must always be treated as a sideline by the private sector. To do otherwise is to make the 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 will it ever create 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 seen 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 keep the industry vital over a long period of time.

Ideally, one would hope that if government aid to production puts an emphasis on quality, this would eventually create the demand for increased quantity. The distribution segment of the industry is crucial if that is to happen. Both Applebert and Fournier have a great deal to say about it. Their comments will be examined in the next issue of Cinema Canada.

A P P L E B E R T

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 a way, the criticisms of the Film Board are based on a lack of understanding of that very principle. Perhaps there are other Norman McLauren there who need a place where they can create and produce. The CFDC does not wish to see the Board done away with, and 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 as sophisticated as I would like it to be," he comments, referring to the film chapter whose "conflicted 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 concede, but only dealt with the production end of the business. "It didn't look at the whole 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 shove it all in one end like the Strasbourg goose. It isn't like that."

In the light of the actual federal context and an imminent federal film policy, on which staffers 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 Applebeaume-Hebert 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.