Random cross-country samples of opinion on film and video policy

Robert Lantos, RSA Entertainment Corp., Toronto:
"Overall, I feel it's a very positive step, long overdue and one which will address the deficiencies of the film industry and create an environment of stability which has not existed until now in Canada. The redefinition of the National Film Board role is equally overdue and reflects the reality of what the NFB should be. The support of the private sector, the leader both creatively and industrially in the film and television industry; it's healthy and reflects reality. However, it stops short of where it should go in terms of protective legislation in the country. What system on foreign films distributed by foreign distributors in Canada? There may be a concentration of too much money and power in the hands of Telefilm Canada that creates the possibility of a giant monster - in the form of the NFB - and reflects reality. However, it's completely idiotic. The Austra-

Pierre René, France

Rene Malo, Les Films René Malo, Montreal:
"The policy is a kind of Kafkaesque. There are excellent chances that the policy will simply be reversed because no government can live with it. The entire mill is against it. I'm talking, of course, about the distribution policy. But there's nothing else in the policy. What is there else there? It's completely superficial. It only repeats what everyone else has been saying for the last five years. It superficially injects $7.5 million, but when you analyse it: there's only $1.5 million for distribution, and $1 million for script development. All the rest goes toward making Telefilm even larger - it's already becoming a huge monster - and Telefilm wants to become even more, and more important. We're going toward a system where production in Canada is going to be a production for the television, and the producers are going to be in the service of the CBC and Telefilm. And, curiously, both organizations are run by just about the same person since Andre Lamir was given his post by Pierre Trudeau himself. And, who controls him completely. It's really a 'gam-mick', and I think it's deplorable that the producers don't understand things more clearly. Especially since the policy just buries the entire film indu-

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Robert Lantos, Robert Lantos, "Overall, which will stimulate growth of the private sector, toward making Telefilm even more or less in the same boat, I think the policy is quite pro-

Millard Roth, Canadian Motion Picture Distributors Association, Toronto:
"I will reconfine myself to those aspects that relate to distribution and, more specifically, to our association. I'm pleased that there is the recognition in the policy of the importance of the association, and of the potential role which we members can play. I think we might be able to play in terms of supporting some of the objectives that are articulated in the policy. Was the policy worth waiting for? I'm some-

Michel Spencer, Filmline Productions, Montreal:
"My general reaction were that the film policy was not a clear call for any particular thrust or action after another. It covered the entire water-front.
They could have put a lot more stress on the question of video-cassettes, for example. Video movies in video stores and all that. They could have said, ‘That’s an important area. We will come up with some special programs to assist Canadian producers to get their stuff marketed.’ But they seem to be trying in every area, except in the case of theatrical distribution. There it appears that the main thrust of their idea is to tell Canadian producers. ‘Try and get into Canada via the U.S. I think they should be honest with Canadian distributors and say, ‘Look you guys, your business is going down the tube. Why should we put any money into it?’’

But they didn’t say that. On the one hand, they say, ‘let’s get Americans to distribute more Canadian films in Canada, and then they have these programs of support for marketing of Canadian productions but it remains to be seen if what they’re going to be doing is assisting Americans.’

“This innegotiation with the U.S. Majors for more Canadian films in theatres is all being presented to us as if it has never happened before. But, in fact, attempts have been made by various ministers to negotiate this kind of a deal, to my knowledge. In 1965, in 1972, probably in 1977. None of it has ever worked because the government of Canada has never taken a solid position up-front with legislation in place that they can use to convince the other side that they are really serious. And I don’t have any hope that this will be any better than any of the other efforts.”

“So on a scale from 1-10, I’d be tempted to give the policy a 5, but that sounds like I have no opinion. So I’ll give it a 4.”

George Christoff.

Filmwest, Edmonton:

“We were hurt a great two years ago when the tax shelter was removed and people no longer had an investment incentive. Until then, we were doing quite well. There is nothing in the most recent policy which repairs the image which has been done.”

The impetus is good. It’s structurally valid with the future technology and all that. But it’s too early to tell whether it’s just going to be centered in the Montreal-Toronto-Ottawa triangle again, or whether it’s going to get here.”

“The Film Board has always been good to us out here. The concern is that the Film Board were the lab people down East or the film policy does not address. They provide us with work over the rough periods – it’s a very symbiotic relationship... The new mandates won’t have any effect; it’s just words.”

Peter Simpson, Simcom Ltd., Toronto:

“I guess my impression is generally favorable. It seems to draw all the areas together. From wathing the events over the years, there wasn’t a single policy before. Now what they’ve done is amalgamated all the various policies into one cohesive body. I don’t think they’ll necessarily fit that well together. It wasn’t really thought out as one policy; it’s simply an amalgamation.”

“The policy is weak in its attempt at marketing, in the distribution of Canadian film... Having quiet chats with the majors just doesn’t work. Fundamentally, it’s one thing to make sure they have access to the screens in this country is another, and I don’t think they’ve been realistic about insuring that that is going to happen.”

“It’s a good idea. There’s no specific help for features. Pointing out the continued existence of the capital cost allowance is a bit of a joke because you couldn’t get arrested selling cca’s these days. It’s nice that it’s there, but having it on the statute books and having it function is a different thing. There will be positive aspects. For the first time they have acknowledged the distribution and marketing phase. They have acknowledged that there is help needed in that area. I hope they’re going to do some experimentation by Canadian distributors on Canadian films with theatrical chains will show the warts and perhaps lead to a more comprehensive policy which will be more realistic about getting the job done.”

Andy Emilio, Citadel Distribution, Toronto:

“I think the policy is irrelevant to distribution. It is going to Americanize whatever Canadian production is done from here on in. It puts the control which people like myself had – the entrepreneurs – into the hands of the government and Telefilm Canada. Canadian distributors used to be involved, because we knew the marketplace from the ground up – better than the producer at certain given times. Now the Majors are to handle the films, not only in the States but in Canada. Aside from putting us down in our own country, we don’t have a chance to extend outside of the country either. The film policy wasn’t worth waiting for. It doesn’t solve any problems. It will affect the industry adversely. The Canadian part of the film industry up here is still a small part of the whole. Most of the films, if the production does not address, can take. Taking all facets of the industry – producers, directors, actors, writers, distributors – the policy is still going to lead the good Canadian people out of Canada because the Americans will learn to cultivate people up here and bringing them down. It’s not going to prove the industry in any way.”

Allen Stein.

Filmwest, Edmonton:

“I think almost everybody in the private film industry applauds the spirit of the film policy, and I join with them. But there are quite a few things which alarm me about it. The main thing is that – I don’t want to be a stick in the mud or an East thing, or the Hinterland against the Metropolis – but those of us who have been in the film business at a disadvantage no matter how open and warm and sensitive the people in the central institutions are to us, because of the centralization of these very institutions. Just to make the phone calls and the trips to Toronto, we’re at a huge financial disadvantage because that’s an expensive and time-consuming phenomenon. And we’re not part of the gossip mill and the socializing that goes on in Toronto so, just for starters, we’re at a disadvantage and the film policy does not address that issue at all. The word ‘regional’ only crops up once in the film policy, and only with reference to the Film Board part of the policy. So what scares me is that there are no directives in the policy to govern the basic principles by which Telefilm will operate vis-à-vis regional parity and regional development. In fact, its developmental role is very subject to question because Telefilm, in the past, has shown itself to be more interested in the Hollywood orientation. The problem is that a few people or even one person has a lot of discretionary power. Without that, some of those that would satisfy people here, it’s a little bit scary. With all its money, Telefilm doesn’t seem to be very oriented toward the first-time producer, or the producer who is outside of the standard clique.”

“Most people are pretty skeptical about the distribution part, because it means that the problem is so much more fundamental than just quotas or voluntary quotas or whatever they try to do. It’s a whole cultural kind of thing, and it’s so deep and it’s so broad that you try to attack this problem without trying to kindle the whole national imagination, which is really what it’s all about...”

(cont. on p. 39)
Random opinions (cont. from p. 38)

Jack Darcus, Exile Film Productions, Vancouver: "I'm impressed with what they are talking about. The main problem is the elections. I'm worried about the removal of Francis Fox and I'm not sure that was the best thing to do in the middle of the process. The election is going to matter very much for the filmmakers because the implementation of the policy is, I expect, going to be questionable.

"The most promising part of the policy is that something is going to be done about distribution of Canadian films in Canadian theatres. The surface thrust is that a lot of money is going to be distributed to people in the industry but behind it is the idea of a fair system in Canada for Canadian films and Canadian theatres. All the details of the thing sound very positive. I think that what's happened in the past is that a 'good will' system has been put into place. My understanding, from the film policy meetings we've had out here, is that they will explore ways to bring pressure upon the Americans to do something about this. I'm not interested in good will myself because I just don't believe it works, but after a six-month period of evaluation, they will talk about such things as tax levies, quotas and all that. I think the idea that the Americans will somehow see more Canadian films in America might add up to a little more than tokenism. The problem to be addressed is that all the money leaves the country every year without any of it resting here, doing what it should for us as it does in other countries."

Andre Link, Cinepix, Montreal "Generally, I think it's a step in the right direction, with one extremely disturbing factor which concerns distribution. I think that, in so far as distribution is concerned, the policy is short-sighted, erroneous, ignorant and devastating. It should be changed. As it stands, it's an absolute negation of what has been said and done for the past ten years and more. You still have to show me a country in which there is indigenous production without national distributors. If Canada is to be the new model, well, I'd like to see that."

Victor Loewy, Vivafilm, Montreal: "There's not a single word of new facts, new suggestions, new ideas. They are simply rehashing the same paper I've seen for the last six years. Basically, what I see is that they have hired more people, and they came up with the same policies. They watered down everything vis a vis the Majors, they left the field totally open to them, and we're extremely unhappy with them.

"I'm falling back to my old position. I don't give a shit one way or the other what the government does because they're not helping us. I'm going to suggest to my organization (of distributors) that we should stop operating with them in any way and treat them as if they don't exist. They have never, never done anything we told them to do. We submitted a very specific paper about pay-TV which they have never followed. We have submitted suggestions about the video policy. It hasn't been followed, and everything is, once again, controlled by the Majors.

"I was totally and completely surprised by the policy. I would never believe that Francis Fox would sell out to such an extent. It's a joke. What are their conclusions? I've seen that they are going to go to the Majors to beg them to agree to take money from Telefilm to launch Canadian films. That's all. Basically, I thought that the policy was going to give Telefilm Canada something to do. Before, 80% of the money given to them was used up to pay the salaries. Now they're just hiring more incompetent people. But what are they doing? I've asked Lamy now for years, I want to know what they're doing, what they've done since Lamy took over. I never had any beef before, but since Lamy took over, there's been nothing. I'm deeply dissapointed, so much so that in my case it's going to influence the way I'm going to vote."

Allocations by the Société

MONTREAL - Since the Société générale du cinéma became Quebec's principal film-financing agency Feb. 20, it has allocated over $2 million of public money to 75 private-sector projects.

Figures released July 17 report an allocation of $2,365,144 to 75 projects between Feb. 20 and July 13, 1984. Thirty-two projects ($322,323) fall under the development category; 16 projects ($73,996) in the category of distribution; 17 special projects ($269,364); and three projects ($43,260) in the marketing category.

Since the 1984-1985 aid plan (approximately $8 million) went into effect June 1, the SGC had by July 9 received applications for a total of 109 projects with budgets totalling $40 million, of which the SGC was being requested to invest $7 million.

"The state has allocated $10 million towards cinema this year," SGC CEO Nicole M. Boisvert told Cinema Canada. "Just think of what we could do with $25 million a year."

The Fournier Report, which recommended the creation of the SGC, also recommended an annual film-financing budget of $25 million.

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