Random cross-country sample of opinions on film & video policy

Robert Lantos, RSL Entertainment Corp., Toronto:

“Overall, I feel it’s a very positive step, long overdue and one which will substantially help provide a bigger film industry and a more competitive film industry. I think that film industry and a more healthy and... reflections reality. However, it stops short of where it should go in terms of protective legislation in the future. It’s a system on foreign films distributed by the NFB that would allow for more to be done. There’s a constant check and balances established so as to keep Telefilm in tune with the private sector.”

Rene Malo, Les Films Malo, Montreal:

“The policy, as a whole, is Kafkaesque. There are excellent chances that the policy will simply be reversed because no government can live with it. The entire milieu is against it. I’m talking, of course, about the distribution policy. But there’s nothing else in the policy. What’s there else in the policy? It’s all external. It only repeats what everyone has been saying for the last five years. It injures $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, curiosity, both organizations are run by just about by the same person since Andre Lamy was given his post by Pierre Trudeau, who is his minister-in-law, and who controls him completely. It’s really a ‘gammick’ and I think it’s deplorable that the producers don’t understand things more clearly. Especially since the policy just buries the entire film industry. It is an addressor itself to the television industry. It’s completely idiotic. The Australians have refused to sign a co-production treaty agreement with Canada, saying that the Canadian conception was even worse.”

Tom Shandel, Jericho Films Ltd., Vancouver:

“You know for those of us on the Coast, or in the provincial enclaves like the Montreal English, who are, I imagine more or less in the same boat, I feel that it’s more regressive and it’s a step in the right direction and it’s a bigger step I think than I’ve ever seen before in my working lifetime which is about 13 years in this business, because it’s a huge movement. One of the things I’ve said that superceded this in my view is the fact that he’s out in the cold since Turner’s been in. And this, I find shocking because I thought that the move for the kind of cultural components of this film business staying in the Department of Communication has actually been basically salutary for those of us in the industry.”

“Fox understood in a tradi- tional liberal small ‘l’ liberal sense and big ‘l’ liberal sense in terms of what’s possible for one to do for the system on foreign films distribution, and it’s obvious that had Paramount or Fox product been presented, we would have been given the run around, I’ll keep limping along, that’s all.”

“Finally, it’s been three years now that Fox has done nothing. What Fox has got is to get the people that he even talks about it, but one can only conclude that it’s a move that wasn’t worth touching. I’ve always found that strange because there is a distribution problem here at the governmental level, let’s not kid ourselves. Cinema is after all not a major industry in Canada. There is a Canadian film industry or is not going to change the face of the economic Canada even if you put the entire industry together from exhibition to production, it does not repre- sent an enormous activity. And distribution is a tiny fraction of this. And politicians are simply not prepared to undertake a great battle to save that sector. Or so it seems to me. It seems to me that what’s been said in the past 30-40 years, nothing’s ever been done really, it’s just not worth it.”

“So things’ll go on pretty much as they’ve been. I don’t really know what the great difficulty is since Fox is after all not the first minister to have ever tackled this dossier. But for all sorts of reasons it’s they that have it. And you look at it in practice two years later, nothing comes of it – distribution, nothing. Exhibition, nothing.”

“Millard Roth, Canadian Motion Picture Distributors Association, Toronto: There will be substantial changes 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 existence of the association, and of the potential role which members of the association 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- what ambivalent in that area. There are some positive aspects of the statement, and there are some lacks to be filled in to answer the questions of whether it’s worth waiting for.”

“Obviously, policy is not going to impact on the industry nearly as extensively as the broadcast policy which introduced the broadcast fund. The impact will be of a much longer term: some of the mechanisms and the objectives need a longer term to take hold.”

Pierre René, France

“I haven’t even read it so you see the kind of importance it has in my eyes. All I know is that they have told me absolutely nothing for the independent producers and that’s about it. Even if some have said that it kills the sector, I can’t see how you can kill something that exists. As far as I know distribution in English Canada is almost dead.”

“Anyway, for the moment, the policy doesn’t affect me. It might have if the federal government had taken the decision to revitalize the independent sector, and it’s obvious that had Paramount or Fox product been presented, we would have been given the run around, I’ll keep limping along, that’s all.”

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Michael Spencer, Filmmine Productions, Montreal:

“My general reactions were that the film policy was not a clear call for any particular thrust or action over another. It covered the entire water-front.”

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but... it's much too diffuse.

Since the government introduced the Broadcast Fund last July, its policy should be based on that concept. The thing to do is push Canadian production in the direction in which it can be of some impact. The policy doesn't zero in on anything, and I don't think that provides much leadership or excitement or whatever.

"Although the policy seems to reject the Film Board recommendations of the Applebaum-Hebert Commission, it doesn't really suggest any other policy. It defines no role for the Film Board. It simply says that the Board should be given five years to devise a policy for itself.

When you come to the distribution thing, I think it's a pity that they didn't follow up on the Broadcast Policy. At least there they had given some direction, they said, 'Look, the future for the film industry in Canada is to produce for television because television is something we can control to some extent ourselves.' At least there is a policy...

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 incoherence of 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 Christofi, 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 that damage which has been done.

"This 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 there.

"The Film Board has always been good to us out here. The main complaint about the Film Board was the lab people down East or the film policy does not address that. The Board provides us with work over the rough periods - it's a very symbiotic relationship. The new measures won't have any effect; it's just words."

Peter Simpson, Sincom 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 all 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...

"Hoping to chat with the majors just doesn't work. You fund films and you make sure that 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.

"The fund is 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 statutes 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 would hope that the experimentation by Canadian distributors on Canadian films with theatre chains will show the worth 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 was 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, the movies, the TV series are American. 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 bring 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 mention the Wests vs. East thing, or the Hinterland against the Metropolis - but those of us here in the North feel that at a disadvantage, no matter how open and warm and sensitive the people in the central institutions like the Screen, for example, are to 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 proposition. 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 via a vis a 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. 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 cynical about the distribution part. It seems to me 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 it's hard to try to attack this problem without trying to kindle the whole national imagination, which is really what it's all about..."
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can't hurt but it follows the Hollywood model and Telefilm’s into that. There isn’t a word about Australia, or about an industry which can grow up with a cultural identity as well as being viable financially and artistically."

Andre Link, Cinépix, 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."

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 of 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. And that was eroded and never brought into practice. 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 run 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."

Jim Westwell, Teleucket Film Development Inc., Vancouver:

"We don’t have a particular great need right now to read it but I guess that it just doesn’t affect me immediately at this moment. I guess that’s why I haven’t bothered to pick up and run with it. But inevitably it certainly will effect me down the line and how, I don’t know yet before I read it. But no, I’ve been working on a Hollywood picture and it’s going on and on and that just keeps me busy."