CINE MAG

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 surely benefit the film and television industry and create an environment of stability which has not existed until now in Canada. The misinterpretation of the National Film Board role is equally overdue and reflects the reality of what the NFB should be all about. The heart of the policy, the leadership, the creative potential 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 this time of globalization. What we’ve got on foreign films distributed in Canada is a very weak regulation in the hands of Telefilm Canada that creates the possibility of a giant monolithic system. In the old days, there used to be constant checks and balances established so as to keep Telefilm in tune with the private sector.”

Rene Malo, Les Films Rene Malo, Montreal: “The policy is quite Kafkaesque. There are excellent chances that the policy will simply be reversed because no government can live with it. The entire millieu is anti us. I’m talking, of course, about the distribution policy. But there’s nothing else in the policy. What’s there else in there? It’s completely superficial. It only repeats what everyone is saying for the last five years. It supposedly 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 Lamy was given his post by Pierre Trudeau, who is much in law, and who controls him completely. It’s really a ‘game’, 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, which addresses 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 more idiotic. ‘If I have to judge the policy on a scale from 1 to 10, it’s zero. There’s just nothing in it. No, there’s nothing in it for scripts, so I’ll give it a one.”

Tom Shandell, 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 have the feeling of being in a Brave New World. It’s so in­gressive 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. I’ve been around for a long time. 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 trad­itional liberal small ‘t’ liberal sense and big ‘l’ liberal sense in terms of Canada, there are certain costs to indepen­dent culture and that, regardless of what these costs are, there’s certainly nothing in the minimum threshold that we were prepared to stand for and fight on.’

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Millard Roth, Canadian Motion Picture Distributors Association, Toronto: “I will reserve judgment on those aspects that relate to distribution and, more specifically, to our association. I’m delighted that there is the recognition in the policy of the existence of the association, and of the potential role which membership in this association might have and 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 some­what ambivalent in that area. There are some positive aspects of the statement, and there are some blanks to be filled in to answer the question of whether it’s worth waiting for. ‘Obvi­ously, the policy is not going to impact on the industry nearly as extensively as the broadcast policy which intro­duced the broadcast fund. However, 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 Cime Entertainment Corp.,

Toronto: “I haven’t even read it so you see the kind of importance it has in my eyes. All I know is it was distrusted, that’s all. As for the reaction; from what my colleagues have told me it does absolutely nothing for the independent film community – 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 you have been pushing as far as I know distribution in English. Canada is almost dead.”

“Anyway, for the moment, the policy doesn’t affect me. I might have if the federal government had taken the decision to revitalize the inde­pendent film industry, but it’s obvious that had Para­mount or Fox been part of the policy, we would have been affected. But it will keep limping along, that’s all. ‘Finally, it’s been three years since Fox has done nothing with us. I’m happy that he even talks about it, but one can only conclude that it’s a policy 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. Whether there is an economic policy or not is not going to change the face of the Canadian economy even if you put the entire film industry together from exhibition to production, it does not repre­sent an enormous activity. And distribution is a tiny fraction of this. Most of the politicians are simply not prepared to undertake a great battle to save that sector. So if it seems to me that something has not been said in the past 30-40 years, nothing’s ever been done, 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 dif­ferency is since Fox is after all not the first minister to have ever tackled this dossier. But for all sorts of reasons if they limit your wishes, they’re glad when you look at it in practice two years later, nothing comes of it – distribution, nothing, exhibi­tion, nothing.’

‘If I look at the policy as a distributor, I’d give it a 1 – there’s nothing there. As a citi­zen, I’d give it a 5 or 4 and then, as I said, I haven’t read it.”

Michael Spencer, Filmline Productions.

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

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Random opinions
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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 to 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 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...

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triangle again, or whether it's going to get here.

The Film Board has always been good to us out here. The people who have complained about the Film Board were the lab people down East or the film producers down East. The Film Board provides us with work over the rough periods - it's a very symbiotic relationship...

Peter Simpson, Simcom Ltd., Toronto:

"I guess my impression is generally favorable. It seems to draw all the areas together. From washing 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've necessarily simplified it but what must have come from all that work is that they've been realistic about making 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.

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 hope that some experimentation by Canadian distributors on Canadian films with theatre chains will show the war 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 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 know 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, the foreign films, the major producers 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 dragging 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 - I don't want it to be seen as a stunt vs. East thing, or the Hinterland against the Metropolis - but those of us who are working in the industry 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 various 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 are not part of the gossip mill and are 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 as 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 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, there's that which would satisfy people here, it's 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 sceptical 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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**Random opinions**

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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 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 restructure their film distribution in Canada 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, Televevra Film Development Inc., Vancouver:

"We don't have a particular great need right now to read it but I guess that just it 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."

Victor Loewy, Vivafilms, 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, I think I see is that they have more people and they came up with the same policies. They watered down everything in a way they just 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 on 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 Telfilm to launch Canadian films. That's all. Basically, I thought that the policy was to go 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."

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**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 ($322,233) fall under the development category; 16 projects ($1,662,200) were submitted suggestions on the video policy. It hasn't been followed, and everything is, once again, controlled by the Majors.

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**Canadian Film Magazine (CINE MAG)**

**Twelfth Annual Awards 1984**

**Entry Deadline September 14th**

**Award Categories**

1. Animation
2. Audio-Visual Portable (6 projectors or less)
3. Audio-Visual Non-Portable (7 projectors or more)
4. Commercial
5. Documentary — Uner 30 minutes
6. Documentary — Over 30 minutes
7. Instructional/Educational
8. Sales Promotion and Public Relations
9. Music Video
10. Television Drama — Under 30 minutes
11. Television Drama — Over 30 minutes
12. Television Variety — Under 30 minutes
13. Television Variety — Over 30 minutes

For more information and entry forms, write or call CFTA/ACCT., 32 Front Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5J 1C5. (416) 361-0153.