

Changing the game with a name

The Entertainment Business Branch! So that's the name of the game now for all Canadian filmmakers seeking financial participation from Telefilm. Address your enquiries to the Entertainment Business Branch.

It was bad enough when the Canadian Film Development Corporation suffered the name-change to Telefilm Canada. The change of name brought about a fundamental reorientation of the agency, away from a distinctly Canadian feature film to television programming. Now those interested in artistic programming, documentaries, or blatantly cultural or experimental product, will have to fit the "entertainment" bill to tap into Telefilm funds. This time the implications of the new name seem abundantly clear. What is of greatest concern is that the new orientation goes a long way towards undermining the thrust of Communications minister Marcel Masse's cultural policies – and this, it would appear, with Masse's tacit approval.

But if Telefilm's exclusive concern now is "entertainment", or as its executive director Peter Pearson prophetically told the Toronto Trade Forum last September "the entertainment business", what does that mean? For one, it means that Canadian filmmaking (or, at its broadest, the projection of Canadian culture by means of film and television) has been drastically collapsed from the qualitative notion of culture to the quantitative one of entertainment. In a word, that entertainment is numbers: business deals, ratings, audiences, markets.

And if entertainment *is* business, then that leaves the door wide-open to every other business cliché in circulation these days – namely, that the best kind of business is free-enterprise, that what's good for business is good for America, and what's good for America – as Jack Valenti, on behalf of the U.S. film industry, never hesitates to remind his audiences – is the free-trade that returns to U.S. film and TV production an annual \$1 billion surplus in the balance of trade. And so, in a twinkling, we are faced once again with the U.S.-Canada free-trade question and an issue that's at the heart of that debate; namely, the role of the Canadian cultural industries and their relation to Canadian government cultural policy.

Here, MCA's (read Universal) recent buy-in of one-third control of Cineplex Odeon provides a useful illustration of the kinds of contradictions that business freedom leads to for Canadian cultural policy. When Cineplex-Odeon chairman Garth Drabinsky began the first in a set of moves that have allowed him to lever a U.S. Major into exactly the kind of vertically integrated production-distribution-exhibition system that is illegal in the U.S., it was with the assistance of the Canadian government's Combines Branch. Drabinsky had charged unfair collusion by the U.S. Major's distributors, and with Canadian government leverage, was able to get a hearing for his case. The idea that a bidding system (also illegal in many U.S. states) would solve the problem was planted in the mind of the Director of Combines Investigation – by guess who? – an American Major.

So the long and the short of it is not that a Canadian cultural industry has gained greater space for itself at the expense of the American hold on the Canadian market – but exactly the contrary. MCA's buy-in of Cineplex means that, after two years of unprecedented rhetorical posturing about Canadian cultural identity (be it Cineplex's attack on the U.S. Majors, Marcel Masse's verbal victories, the sad saga of Bill 109 in Quebec, or Roth-Raymond's motherhood litany on behalf of Canadianization), two U.S.

Majors still hold prominent ownership positions in key Canadian cultural structures (and Cineplex – a by no means insignificant player on the Canadian theatrical film scene – has found for itself a place in the California sun as one of Hollywood's cultural emanations.)

The kind of tongue-tied confusion in which all this leaves Canadian cultural policy is all too painfully evident in a speech Marcel Masse had written for, but did not deliver at, a Canadian film industry gathering at Montebello, Quebec, on Jan. 17. This is a speech that opens with a quote from the great French reformer and educator Ernest Renan on the fact that a nation's cultural inheritance is transmitted as a whole.

Masse (or whoever wrote the speech for him) then proceeds to engage in some wholesale rewriting of Canadian film history – most appallingly, misdating the creation of the CFDC by seven years, and making the outrageous claim that "the best achievements in Canadian film were obtained when Canadian television networks commissioned the films," a success that supposedly prompted the creation of the Broadcast Fund. In fact, the fund was created because Canadian networks did not then and still do not now commission Canadian feature films.

Along with such revisions of Canadian history appear statements about the spiritual and cultural values of Canada, the fact that Canada "is more than just a market. It is a separate country. It is a separate culture." After all of which, though, comes the contradictory conclusion that "the most sensible approach to these problems is an industrial one." Which, rhetoric aside, is pretty much where things have always stood – and why nothing changes.

This general policy – which amounts to saying one thing and doing another – is reflected with complete clarity in Bill Nichols, Joanne Marion and Françoise Lachance's report last month on Peter Pearson's visit to the Queen's Business School last November in which Pearson defined Telefilm's *raison d'être* as profitmaking. As this month's letters to the editor show, Pearson maintains that he did not say what the authors heard, and calls *Cinema Canada* "perverse" to have found the article worth printing.

One is left in a quandary; it becomes very unclear whether the Canadian government, its elected officials and cultural agencies are in the business of developing Canadian culture (as the various laws meant to regulate their activities might suggest), or of promoting free-trade.

As Masse put it in the Montebello speech: "Film is considered a major part of what Americans call the 'leisure and entertainment' sector of the economy. It is highly profitable, with potential for expansion that is unknown in other sectors. Canada is a major part of the film market."

This is exactly the kind of language that leads to (and encourages) the creation of Telefilm's Entertainment Business and MCA's buying an important share of Cineplex Corp. This too is the kind of language that echoes and reflects the Americans' own consistent interest in Canada as a quarter of the total U.S. global market and why, under general free-trade, this will only be reinforced.

Now, free-trade with the U.S. may be central to the economic policies of the present Conservative government in Ottawa. But free-trade obscures the fact that such policies have nothing whatever to do with the furtherance of Canada's separate and different culture. Maybe Telefilm should stop playing cultural games and from now on simply report directly to Industry, Trade and Commerce.

LETTERS

Pearson faults Queen's report

On November 7, 1985, I visited Queen's to appear at the Q'BET Conference, and in conjunction with that event, I had a session with the students in the Department of Film Studies.

On January 3, 1986, I received an article from Bill Nichols, Head of the Department of Film Studies, Joanne Marion, and François Lachance, with an article that they had collectively authored. In the letter, the authors wrote "we hope you will let us know if there are any factual errors in the article." Forth-

with, I undertook to answer their request.

On January 7, four days later, I forwarded my observations.

On January 30, 1986, I received a letter signed by Joanne Marion, informing me that the article, submitted in draft to me, had been sent "to *Cinema Canada* at the same time as sending it to you. So, while what we ideally would have liked to do was to respond to your comments by rewriting the article, making clarifications and corrections where necessary, this has proved well-nigh impossible."

I believe Professor Nichols, Ms. Marion and Mr. Lachance have been extraordinarily remiss in their behaviour.

1. While I would not claim that at any point I requested that the session with the Queen's students be "off-the-record", clearly it was an informal get-to-

gether, wide-ranging, and unstructured. There was no indication from anyone at any time that anything I said would be recorded, or indeed quoted.

2. I understand this article was submitted to *Cinema Canada* under the letterhead of the Department of Film Studies, and therefore reflects a certain intellectual rigour as befits any academic paper. Regrettably, there is no direct quotation of any remark I supposedly said. Nor indeed, is there any paraphrasing.

In conversation with Bill Nichols on January 30, he led me to believe that the article was written, not only with no tape recording of my remarks, but not even with any note-taking as a basic information document.

3. Telefilm has been, since the inception of the Broadcast Fund in 1983, exceptionally transparent in its disclosure

of information. Each month a public document is made available, listing all of the financial information and sources of financing.

Further, at regular intervals, to anyone who so requested, we have provided lists of titles, producers, directors, writers and stars, for scrutiny.

In addition, at the completion of each fiscal year, we have provided a detailed examination of each year of the Broadcast Fund. For your information, *After Two Years* is our most recent report on the Fund.

4. None of this information was either requested, or used in the drafting of this document.

5. While at Queen's, on November 7, I lunched with Bill Nichols and Peter Morris, specifically to encourage