

# Free trade gets thumbs down at fest

TORONTO — They came, they listened and then they overwhelmingly voted down a resolution in support of free trade following a debate on the issue at Toronto's Festival of Festivals.

After listening to two-man for and against panels the audience voted 83.4 per cent against free trade and 15.8 per cent in favor with .8 per cent undecided. A total of 117 votes were cast in the debate which was part of the festival's trade forum.

The debate focused on the resolution that a free trade agreement between Canada and the United States will be of significant benefit to Canadians in the Canadian film and television industries.

Art Murphy, a University of Southern California film school professor, and Steven Globerman, a professor of business administration and economics at British Columbia's Simon Fraser University, teamed up in favour of the resolution.

Opposing free trade were David Crane, a *Toronto Star*

writer, and Stephen Roth, a Canadian producer and co-chairman of a 1985 federal task force report on the feature film industry in Canada.

Part of the debate focused on one of the task force's main recommendations which is that Canadian-owned companies must take control of film and video distribution in Canada.

Murphy said the film and television broadcast industries are basically capitalist and opened his remarks by announcing, "I'm an unrepentant, unabashed free trader."

Murphy said free trade brings with it strong implications of competition in whatever field. He added that every artist is in competition with others and in competition you have winners and losers.

He said the arts transcend national borders and will always continue to do so. Murphy explained that he is strongly opposed to any attempt to develop legislation that would only allow Canadian companies to distribute

foreign films in Canada.

"It will, I promise you, cause the near total disappearance of United States films from this country," he warned.

"Good-bye Barbra Streisand, good-bye Clint Eastwood, good-bye Robert Redford," he said and was met with applause from those opposed to free trade.

"Canada is a very important export market, it often is the number one or number two, but... it is not even as big as the third largest film sales area in the United States."

"The American film companies feel they are in a position where they cannot lose this one, because if the number one or two export market has to yield to certain conditions then everyone else will fall in line. Lots of luck and I'll take side bets on whether this one will come to pass."

The ayatollahs of these cultural policies would not dare tax customers specifically to help support Canadian productions, he said. Murphy said the way to get Canadian films on

the screen is to make good Canadian films.

Roth countered that all art must start somewhere and at least during its inception it is parochial. Roth, president of Alliance Entertainment Corporation, said he is concerned free trade will have a negative impact on the Canadian film and television industries.

The domination of the Canadian distribution system by Americans was partly because great Canadian films meriting access to a large number of screens, by and large, have not been made in the past. He said that is all changing because great Canadian films are being made in larger numbers now and there is also a gradual change occurring in the attitude of American distributors.

Roth explained that great Canadian films have not been made in significant numbers in the past because the control of the distribution system has been in the hands of people who have been taking the money out of the country.

He argued that Canadians must protect their industry, but not to the exclusion of any other country. He said anything that smacks of quotas or

taxes on foreign films would not be supported.

"The film and television industry in Canada is dependent for support upon Canadians." He said English-speaking Canada, with only 17 million people, is too small an economic market to allow the film industry to stand on its own.

"Culture to me is the expression of an identifiable group of people under threat — under economic threat... Those things that we consider culture — to Americans are not culture at all. They are industrial."

He said for a film to succeed it must open in its domestic market and do well there and then it will begin to be noticed elsewhere.

"Therefore the argument that I am making is essentially that there is no conceivable benefit that these free trade talks can have for the Canadian film and television industry."

Roth said the only result free trade can have is to erode the precarious protection now existing for the industry and that Canadians and all North Americans would, in the end, suffer.

"A very dynamic industry



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insight



right at this point would be in great peril of disappearing.”

Globerman listed trade restrictions in the film and broadcast sectors as including Canadian content rules, Telefilm Canada funding and tax shelters provided by the federal government.

He said trade restrictions push up costs in the industry and that free trade would oblige domestic producers to be more efficient.

Globerman said subsidies skew production away from areas where Canada has a comparative advantage. Free trade could mean a shift from big budget feature films and television movies here to more documentaries and shorter films, he said.

Free trade arrangements may mean fewer feature and television movies are made in Canada, but audiences would find what is made is of better quality, he added.

Globerman said he is an advocate of free trade because overall it will lead to an improved Canadian cultural product.

Crane said he is concerned that Canada's cultural policies will be bargained away at the table during talks between Canada and the United States.

The *Toronto Star* writer said Canadian cultural policies aren't intended to close doors to U.S. culture, but instead are designed to make sure Cana-

dian culture survives.

“We probably have the most open border to U.S. culture of anyone in the world,” he argued. He said, for example, 97 per cent of the movies and videos seen in Canada are imports, while the remaining three per cent are Canadian. Crane said he can't understand why the Americans are so anxious to grab hold of the remaining Canadian market.

“The challenge for Canada is to make sure our cultural products reach Canadian audiences.” He said cultural policies are the means which allow Canadians to express their ideas, works, aspirations

and history to one another.

“And out of that we affirm our shared experience as a country, we develop our sense of values, we preserve the things that we think are important to us, that represent our differences from the United States, which are important to us.”

Crane said a large part of the nation's wealth in the United States is spent on defence in a country that is consumed by concern over national security issues.

By way of contrast, in Canada, cultural policy and our national identity have the same importance, he said.

## Schein dims as he bows out

TORONTO — After less than a one-year stint as head of the Festival of Festivals Leonard Schein has resigned as director of the annual event citing personal reasons for his departure.

A news release from Jon Slan, chairman of the board of the festival, announced that Schein resigned his post to pursue other interests.

The festival's deputy director, Helga Stephenson, has taken over the director's responsibilities until a new director is found. A nominating committee has been formed to

find a successor to Schein.

In an interview with *Cinema Canada* Schein said he left the festival for “personal reasons” and added that he has not yet decided what he wants to do next. “I think it was a very successful film festival,” he said adding that he is very happy to have had the chance to work on the festival.

The Toronto daily press reported that Schein had been criticized by festival staff and others and that he had been involved in conflicts with staff at the festival office.

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