

TFC figures elude committee

TORONTO — Telefilm Canada officials have been asked to explain why, less than a week before the agency's \$48 million over-commitment was announced, a Parliamentary committee was told there was no such problem.

MP Jim Edwards said he discussed the issue with Telefilm Canada chairman Jean Sirois and asked that members of the federal film and television funding corporation appear before the committee to explain the situation. Telefilm was scheduled to appear on November 17.

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The issue stems from a question by MP Sheila Finestone at an Oct. 20, 1987 committee hearing in Montreal.

Finestone asked Judith McCann, the recently appointed interim executive director of Telefilm, if the agency was presently over-committed in any of its programs in its current fiscal year.

McCann replied that Telefilm was not over-committed, according to committee minutes.

But on Oct. 26, 1987 Telefilm officials held press conferences in Montreal and Toronto to explain that the agency had over-committed its support for film and television producers by \$48 million.

Edwards, chairman of the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, told *Cinema Canada* that he wants to reserve judgement on precisely what the overall problems at Telefilm are until the agency appears before the committee.

Telefilm will be included as part of the committee's final report on broadcasting that is to be presented to the minister of Communications in 1988, Edwards said. The committee will be making recommendations about Telefilm, but, he added at that point, it was too early to tell whether they are for changes or not.

"My concern is based on belief that Telefilm is a very, very effective instrument and it gets Canadian programming on the air as far as the broadcast fund is concerned," he told *Cinema Canada*. Edwards added that any "grief" Telefilm comes to is a setback for the industry.

Representatives of indepen-

dent producers, television networks, and other groups appeared before the committee during three days of hearings in Toronto. Comments on Telefilm ranged from harsh criticism to confusion and concern.

CTV network representatives told the committee that Telefilm's management problems have created serious difficulties in underwriting future Canadian productions. In fact, they said the situation has undermined prospects for at least four major CTV projects.

Network president Murray Chervoer said he wasn't sure what Telefilm had committed to CTV and added that a recent Telefilm report attributed programs to CTV that aren't even licensed by the network.

Chervoer, in response to a question from the committee chairman, explained that overall there has been a practical shift at Telefilm from industry-based judgements about the use of its broadcast fund to more cultural judgements.

CBC English television vice-president Denis Harvey said it was difficult at the time to get accurate statistics on exactly

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Dubbing raises hackles

MONTREAL — A warning shot has been fired. The federal department of Communications has asked the government of France not to renege on an agreement-in-principle to allow television programs dubbed in Quebec into the French marketplace.

Failure to meet this commitment, signed by both governments in Montreal, Nov. 5, could mean retaliatory measures by the federal government but this is unlikely to happen, say federal government officials.

Paul Racine, director-general of federal/provincial relations, department of Communications, told *Cinema Canada* that the French government has agreed that to jeopardize a Canada/France co-production treaty, worth close to \$250 million in productions since 1984, would be a high price to pay for protectionism where dubbing is concerned.

Further talks were scheduled for mid-November in France where representatives of Quebec's French-language actors union, Union des Artistes, and private television network executives meet their opposite numbers in the French industry.

This delegation will give further assurances, says Racine, that Canada's new (July 1986) annual \$3 million dubbing fund will be used for Canadian cultural product and will not be used to subsidize the Quebec dubbing industry which, in turn, would dump American programs in the French market.

This, he says, is the main concern of the private networks and actors' union in France who are in the middle of heated contract negotiations.

"We want to assure them that dubbing in Quebec is not a threat. This is a highly symbolic issue," says Racine, who headed the federal government delegation to Montreal on November 5.

"France should not provoke a war, because this is peanuts compared to the benefits of the co-production agreement."

Since the early 1960s, the domestic market in France has been closed to films dubbed outside of the country. In television, a weekly 42 hours of foreign dubbed programming is all that is permissible by decree. The French actors' union, whose members reap a healthy percentage of dubbing fees, are insisting on a strong measure of protectionism in their most recent contract, not yet officially settled, says Racine.

Under a tripartite agreement, signed in January 1987, France, Canada and Quebec agreed to find more equitable trade arrangements in film and television.

Racine admits that the federal government has recently been pressured by the Quebec dubbing industry to take retaliatory measures in response to the French union's protectionist position which flies in the face of the tripartite agreement. The government's position is that retaliation is unnecessary at this time with negotiations underway.

"We have been pressured to take retaliatory measures now, but," says Racine, "there may come a time when it will be difficult not to."

Racine denies reports that the department of Communications has claimed that Lise

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B.C. Film tailored for B.C. needs

VANCOUVER — British Columbia's new funding agency, B.C. FILM, has "learned from Telefilm's mistakes" and has stolen the best ideas from Alberta and Manitoba according to the man in charge, Wayne Sterloff. He should know. As former head of Telefilm's Western Region he had ample opportunity to examine the successes and failures of every film-funding agency in the country.

B.C. FILM (which was launched as FILM BC but changed to "put BC first") has \$10.5 million to invest over the next three years. The money comes from the province's overflowing Lottery account. It's expected to stimulate about \$42 million worth of production creating up to 600 short-term jobs each year. Those are the claims made by the press kit; Sterloff filled in some of the blanks at the Vancouver Film Festival's Trade Forum in October.

He says the guidelines and procedures of B.C. FILM will work differently from those customary in Toronto or Montreal. For example he expects B.C.

FILM to support production of non-theatrical films.

"I don't think federal agencies have a grasp on the nature of our film community in B.C. The development of new talent works differently (in B.C.) from downtown Toronto. We need non-theatrical projects to develop skills."

Talent development seems to be a major item on the B.C. FILM agenda. With the bulk of Canadian productions happening in Ontario and Quebec, B.C. FILM is having to play something of a catch-up role.

"What the community should be striving for is to dig up our best storytellers," says Sterloff. The agency will select novelists, playwrights and others with stories to tell and match them with screenwriters who will teach them the mechanics of movie writing. This emphasis is especially popular with native organizations anxious to commit their legends and traditions to modern media forms.

Given that the British Columbia government is made up of ultra-free-enterprising So-Creds, filmmakers were con-

cerned about Sterloff's earlier statement that the agency "will be tough and businesslike in its approach to ensure the projects we assist are winners." How does that apply to non-theatrical (i.e., often unprofitable) productions?

"The distributors will tell us what we're going to invest in. When a project comes in (it will) be evaluated on how we're going to recover the money. Non-theatrical projects will depend on distributor reaction," Sterloff elaborated.

The government departments behind B.C. FILM (Tourism, Recreation and Culture & The Provincial Secretary) see job creation as an important goal, not surprising in a province experiencing the ill-health of a resource-based economy. Sterloff says there is more to their goal than a mathematical accounting of man-hours of work created.

"A portion of our industry thrives on credits. We want to see B.C. companies receiving substantial credit (when involved in co-productions) and a

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Spring date for broadcasting

TORONTO — "We're pawing the ground" anxiously awaiting the new broadcasting act, says the chairman of the Parliamentary committee on Communications and Culture.

Tory MP Jim Edwards said the committee accelerated its agenda so its final report on broadcasting will be ready early in 1988.

As a result it looks like the long-awaited new broadcasting act will be completed, at the earliest, sometime in the spring of 1988.

Earlier, Minister of Communications Flora MacDonald said she would not release the new broadcasting act until she

has received the committee's final report.

The committee travelled to various cities in Ontario and Quebec this fall to get public comment on the key recommendations made in the massive Caplan-Sauvageau Task Force on Broadcasting.

During three days of hearings in Toronto the committee received information on a wide variety of subjects relating to Canadian broadcasting including the future of the CBC, the problems of Telefilm Canada, the role of the NFB and the status of independent producers.

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Few answers, TFC returned \$22 M

OTTAWA - Telefilm Canada met with the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture on Nov. 17 and tried for two-and-a-half hours, vainly, to explain why, on Oct. 20, it reported to the committee that it was in no difficulty, only to call a press conference on Oct. 26 to announce an overcommitment of \$48 million.

Telefilm proved incapable of clarifying the financial situation, despite the presence of Richard Turcotte, on leave from Thorne Ernst Whinney for three months to serve as vice-president Finance at Telefilm. (The appellation "vice-president" itself seemed indicative of the confusion at Telefilm. Since Telefilm has no "president" but only an "executive director" and a "chairman of the board", staff seems uncertain how Turcotte fits into the scheme of things.)

Little of substance transpired at the hearing. The members of the committee were genuinely frustrated at not getting clear answers to their questions, and the frustration sometimes flared into anger.

Two new bits of information were released.

First, Telefilm's audited statement notes that the agency returned \$22 million to the government last year and not \$17 million as often stated by Telefilm. Chairman of the Board Jean Sirois used the \$17 million figure as recently as the press conference of Oct. 26.

Second, included in the \$22 million was an amount of \$5 million requested by the minister of Communications which was used by the department to cope with a severe financial problem concerning museums. Unable to get additional funding from the treasury board for the museums, Flora MacDonald was reported to have requested sums from all her agencies on an annual basis for three years. A similar sum will be returned next year and the following year.

Incapable of getting clear answers to their questions concerning verbal commitments, budget overruns and the decision-making process at the agency, the committee ordered Telefilm to furnish it with a written list of all committed projects as of Oct. 30. It also demanded a financial statement which was intelligible.

Telefilm's major defence of its position seemed to be that the demand for funds was so great, it had overwhelmed the agency. Committee member Jim Caldwell countered that argument.

"You've geared this whole industry up to a fever pitch and now you're going to drop it like hot balloon. Just because the demand is there does not mean you service it. We live in a world of reality. Towns need roads and cities need water and no government can ever meet all the demands."

The Telefilm representatives admitted that they anticipate no new funds for the agency, and that if this year is going to be grave, next year might be worse.

TFC to explain

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what programs would receive support from Telefilm. He explained there was confusion about the general situation.

"There is no question there is a number of programs in jeopardy," Harvey told committee members.

The Canadian Film and Television Association (CFTA) recommended that a full inquiry be undertaken to find out the reason for the over-commitment of funds. The CFTA, in its written brief, also recommends Telefilm should be reorganized and restaffed and that the government should decide whether extra money will be needed for the next fiscal year.

CFTA director Sam Jephcott said many association members question whether Telefilm should take a studio role and approve projects on the basis of scripts.

"It's the arbitrary choosing of projects that concerns many members," he said.

Members of the Association of Canadian Film and Television Producers also expressed concern about recent developments at Telefilm. But Stephen Roth, Alliance Entertainment Corporation chairman and association member, cautioned the committee about the nature of the problem at Telefilm.

Explaining that demand on Telefilm far exceeds the money available, Roth said the problems of the federal corporation are related to success rather than failure. Roth said it still must be determined how many projects are affected, but there will be a shortfall next year and a lingering problem.

During the Toronto hearings, Edwards asked some of those appearing whether they thought Telefilm had overstated the amount of its \$48 million over-commitment to achieve another goal.

Several answered it was possible although Edwards in a later interview conceded it was a "street rumour" of which no evidence had yet been found.

TORONTO - The 15th annual Canadian Film and Television Awards were presented November 19 at Ontario Place.

Norman Jewison received a special jury award in recognition of his efforts in founding the Canadian Centre for Advanced Film Studies.

Some other winners include Roger Frappier and Pierre Gendron of Cinema Plus Productions, Lynda Schuyler and Kit Hood of Playing With Time Inc., cinematographer Guy Dufaux, cameraman William Gimmi, Aimée Danis of Les productions du Verseau Inc., André Chagnon of Le Groupe Videotron Ltee., and Robert Ferchat, president of Northern Telecom Canada.

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