

After a relatively quiet summer someone seems to have connected the jumper cables to the Atlantic region and flipped the switch. Electricity is running through all the circuits and many technical film types I know are having to choose between job offers.

If they haven't been shipwrecked on a latter-day *African Queen*, Lulu Keating and her band of Red Snappers should be on location in Zimbabwe filming her feature drama *Africa Chronicles*. Based on autobiographical experiences, this film is about a coming-of-age of a young woman sent to Africa to do aid work. Straight out of *A Winter Tan*, Canada's own lady of tropical climes Jackie Burroughs is slated for a lead role. Hope all is going well midst the rhinos and pythons.

Speaking of snakes, production has recently been completed in Shediac on a blood & gore action flic called *Snake Eater*. Produced by Montreal's Cinepix (producers of *Meatballs* and the dreadful *My Bloody Valentine*, shot deep in a mine in Glace Bay) in collaboration with N.B.'s Carota Films, this 35mm feature took only 18 days to shoot. Crew I talked to are still trying to catch up on sleep after grueling 22-hour days. Look for this one at your local drive-in on a midnight triple-bill.

All kinds of other features are sitting in the wings just waiting for that final cheque from Telefilm. Picture Plant is all set to go with *The Vacant Lot*, Bill MacGillivray's newest tale, this time set in the youth music subculture. Salter Street Films (now, in fact, situated on Barrington Street) are teetering on the brink of beginning *George's Island*, a children's feature based on Nova Scotia folk-tales and ghost stories. Rumour has it that they have been having a very difficult time pinning down Telefilm over this one. They seem to be having no trouble, however, getting another eight episodes of *Coico 'The Movie'* on the road. The second series will shortly go to air on CBC and the third series is slated for production this month.

From the "it's hard to keep a good Legionnaire down" department: Salter Street's Roman time-travel adventure film, *Normanicus*, shot two years ago in Argentina seems to have emerged from the catacombs. Originally slated for release at last year's *Atlantic Festival Atlantique* it ran into problems with the producers and seemed destined for closet limbo. However, retitled as *A Switch in Time*, it has emerged in the line-up for screenings at this year's festival. *Video meliora, proboque; Deteriora sequor*. I see and approve better things, but follow worse. — Ovid, *Metamorphoses*.

Also slated for production this fall is the NFB's *Justice Denied*, a feature-length docu-drama based on Michael Harris's book on the Donald Marshall story. In New Brunswick a science film called *Atarelle Pacmaniens*, set in the 21st century, is slated for production this fall.

Lots of other projects are also currently in the works. Animator extraordinaire Jim Henson is coming to Nova Scotia to shoot a half-hour fantasy film called *Lighthouse Island - She's Special*. Magic crystal balls, enchanted slippers, evil creatures and mermaids inhabit the script written by Jerry Juhl which will be shot on location at Nova Scotia's kingdom of kitsch, Peggy's Cove. Luciano Lisi, formerly of P.E.I.'s Points East Productions, and collaborator Christine Kavanagh have formed a Halifax-based company called Gamma Production. Gamma has just wrapped *The Bell Ringers*, a halfhour tale for the CBC's *Family Pictures Anthology* series which was shot on location at Nova Scotia's historic Sherbrooke Village. (See *On Location* this issue) Based on a short story by B.C. writer Sam Roddan, it is a historical tale set in a small town in the 1920s. Post-production begins ASAP since the series is slated for broadcast in January of 1989.

Also in the bag for this same series is *There's Nothing To Do Here* written by Gail Collins for Newfoundland's Red Ochre Production (a.k.a. Ken Pitman). Set in a Newfoundland outpost, it is the story of a girl from the city (St. John's) who has to spend a summer with her country cousins. These two are the only episodes of this 15-part series to be shot in the Atlantic Provinces. Ken's feature drama, *Finding Mary March*, which was shot last year in Newfoundland, was the opening night gala at this year's *Atlantic Festival Atlantique*.

Also on the Halifax waterfront is another series of *Blizzard Island* (do Atlantic filmmakers have something about the word *Island*??) being produced by Studio East. This is a series of 12 half-hours for children set on *Blizzard Island*, an island inhabited only by puppets, following the adventures of Tracy Allen and her brother Wayne as they try and find the Great Argon.

Ontario distributors protest Quebec legislation

MONTREAL — Shut out of the Quebec market by tough Quebec government legislation, Ontario-based distributors have demanded reciprocal action by their own provincial government.

Sections 104 and 105 in the Quebec Cinema Act prohibit independent foreign and Canadian distributors from doing business in Quebec if they are not based in the province or fail to meet specific qualification criteria. This legislation came into effect Sept. 30, 1988.

Regulations under sections 104 and 105 — determining licensing procedure, the legal distinction between film and video, the status of distribution inventory before Sept. 30, 1988 — will not be finalized before mid-December, according to a Quebec government spokesperson.

In the meantime, the law is being condemned as unfair and unconstitutional by many distributors who fear they will not qualify for a distribution permit in Quebec. There is much talk about the need for reciprocal legislation in other provinces.

At the center of this swirling controversy are the Quebec-based distributors who say that the original intent of the Quebec Cinema Act, first introduced in 1983, was to protect the indigenous industry where federal legislation does not.

André Link, president of the Association Québécoise des Distributeurs et Exportateurs de Films et de Vidéo and recently appointed president of the Institut Québécois du Cinéma, says Quebec is doing what must be done in order to protect its distribution industry.

"If you can't control your own market then you cannot have your own industry," says Link who on behalf of the distributor's association has sent a vote of confidence to the Quebec government.

Reciprocal legislation in Ontario may not be a bad idea, says Link.

"Quebec has acted within its own jurisdiction. It is now up to the rest of Canada to act. The ball is in their court. If the other provinces were to imitate Quebec you would have reciprocity across the country and Canada would be protected and unified once again."

This distribution law and the divisiveness that it inspires among its critics comes at a time when the Quebec Stock Savings Plan, offering an investment incentive at 133 per cent, is the gleam in the eye of Ontario-based producers who are seeking ways to compensate for the reduction (in 1987) of the Canadian Capital Cost

Allowance for Film. The idea of qualifying for the QSSP appeals to more than a few producers who are at a loss to know how to finance their films.

On the federal front, the government has suspended its Film Importation Bill until after the election and is working out details of how to allocate \$17 million to the distribution industry.

Thus, Pierre Gendron, a successful Quebec-based film producer and partner in Max Films, a production/distribution company with a strong interest in Canadian and foreign distribution, says it is too early to take sides on the issue.

"By the time we know how to use this (\$17 million) fund; by the time the (federal) election is over; by the time we know what Lise Bacon wants to do with the bill and by the time we know how the Americans are reacting we may find that we are all very compatible," says Gendron.

Jonathan Barker, chief executive officer of the Ontario Film Development Corporation also supports a wait-and-see approach.

"We do not know what the real impact is and what the real loss of dollars is. That hasn't been measured."

At the heart of Ontario's concern, says Barker, is the anticipated drain of Ontario productions to Quebec for the investment incentives. He adds, however, that Quebec's distribution legislation is perceived by the Ontario government as being counter productive.

"Ontario is looking closely at its own film policies and in doing so the exclusion of Ontario distributors from Quebec is on the agenda," says Barker.

The Ontario government is studying several types of incentives, according to the Association of Canadian Film and Television Producers. These include a provincial CCA, grants, an investment tax credit and a refundable tax credit program similar to the program that has been proposed to the federal government.

Barker does not expect specific legislation but rather announcements before Christmas on incentives for investment in the Ontario-based film industry.

Where distribution is concerned, he says, barriers thrown up at Quebec's border could be damaging for the Ontario industry.

"I'd rather see Quebec find a way of having Canadian distributors operating throughout Canada. But we have an obligation to the distribution community in Ontario and if the damage is serious and there is no other option we will have to recommend reciprocity to the government against our own philosophical better wishes," says Barker.