

Trade News

Quebec distributors divided over new film fund

MONTREAL – Fearful that eligibility criteria for the new Feature Film Distribution Fund will severely curtail their business in the domestic and foreign markets, several Quebec-based distributors and exporters have resigned from the Association québécoise des distributeurs et exportateurs de films et de vidéo and formed an independent lobby association.

The four former members of the AQDEFV are Astral Films, Les Films du Crépuscule, France Film and Ciné 360. They have been joined by seven other distribution and exporting companies to form the Fédération professionnelle des distributeurs et exportateurs de films du Québec.

The association's mandate is to seek a more democratic application of the fund, says Jan Rofekamp, president of Films Transit and vice-president of the new association.

He says the association is in unanimous agreement, at this early stage, that the fund should not subsidize foreign films.

Among other objections with regard to this \$17 million distribution fund, administered by Telefilm on a five-year renewable basis, is inadequate consultation by Telefilm and Communications Canada with the industry prior to setting eligibility criteria.

Pierre Latour, formerly of Malofilm and now head of distribution at Max Films and a founding member of the new association, told *Cinema Canada* that it was obvious from the beginning that consultation was "a one track deal."

"There was no diversification," says Latour. "They listened only to the association (AQDEFV) and the big six."

The big six, according to Latour, are: Norstar Releasing, Toronto; Spectrafilm, Toronto; Malofilm Group, Montreal; Cinepix, Montreal; Alliance/Vivafilm, Montreal and Cinema Plus, Montreal.

Of these six companies, the four Montreal-based companies remain members of the AQDEFV.

Joseph Beaubien, lobbyist for the AQDEFV, disagrees on all counts. He says the criteria are the result of six months of consultation with associations across Canada and that the main fund was created to serve the more viable companies while the contingency fund will help more companies become eligible for the main fund.

"It is the marketplace that decides who does business, not the fund," says Beaubien, who is president of Vidéoglobe 1 Inc.

Beaubien says the AQDEFV is still willing to

negotiate with the splinter group and that the formation of a new association will not adversely affect the 30-year-old association.

Latour and members of the new association insist that the fund has polarized the theatrical film distribution industry into those larger distributors with access to a \$100,000 to \$1.5 million (maximum) line of credit in the main fund and the smaller distributors with a smaller contingency fund.

Latour explains that this have/have-not situation will result in unfair competition where "the larger commercial distributors will ultimately determine who makes films" by offering guarantees that the companies not included in the main fund cannot afford.

The producers will have no choice but to go to where the money is, says Latour. He explains that expertise in the field, particularly in foreign sales, will soon be eclipsed by the power of public funding.

Latour also decries the fact that half of the fund could conceivably be spent on "inflated" guarantees for foreign films.

"All the funds, not just 50 per cent, should be reinvested through distribution into Canadian productions. Here (in Canada) is where we want to make pictures with good export value and where producers can count on solid guarantees for the domestic and foreign markets. Diverting taxpayers' money to foreign production will not help our Canadian industry," says Latour.

Rofekamp, who has started a letter-writing campaign directed in protest at Pierre DesRoches, director of Telefilm Canada, argues that distribution companies will use the main fund to acquire "all rights" including foreign sales that otherwise would be handled by an independent exporter like Films Transit.

In a letter to DesRoches he writes: "Our own minimum guarantees cannot be as high as those of the government-backed companies because we have to estimate our minimum guarantees upon the real market value of the film... The eligible group does not have to worry about this... In the case the film does not make money there is no reimbursement."

Based on specific criteria, a total of 23 Canadian film distribution companies (out of 30 applications) have qualified for funding this year. Fifteen of these companies have received a fixed amount in the main fund while the remaining eight companies must apply on a film-by-film basis.

The funds must be used as a minimum distributor's guarantee for Canadian theatrical films or to acquire foreign theatrical features for the Canadian market.

For every foreign acquisition and for every investment in one's own production, where the distributor is also the producer, there must be an

Flora gracious in defeat

OTTAWA – Flora MacDonald, the Conservatives' popular minister of Culture and Communications, went down to defeat in her home riding of Kingston and the Islands. First-time candidate Liberal Peter Milliken, a local lawyer, campaigned hard against free trade and brought an end to Ms. MacDonald's 16-year reign in Kingston politics. She began her political career at 19 as a secretary at the local Tory headquarters.

"Without a doubt," Ms. MacDonald told *Cinema Canada*, "the responsibility I enjoyed the most during my time in Ottawa was as minister of Communications. I have served longer than any other woman, except for Agnes McPhail. That's a record, and one that I am rather proud of."

"We set up the feature film fund, which was tremendously important to the industry, and we brought in a film distribution bill with \$200 million attached for both distribution and production, which has made a major contribution. We are now in the process of stabilizing Telefilm which was a mere child when we came into office and now it is one of the major cultural agencies in the country."

"In the future, the big things I would want to see done are broadcasting, which has already gone through the House, film legislation, and work is nearly complete on the second phase of the copyright bill. We should see all of these things through in the next year."

"She certainly earned everyone's respect," said Peter Mortimer of the Association of Canadian Film and Television Producers. "We all share in what is probably her own sense of acute disappointment." Sam Jephcott of the Canadian Film and Television Association said it was sad to see Ms. MacDonald go. "She was totally committed to fighting for us all the way. It's disturbing to lose a champion."

Contacted in Ottawa for comment, Michael Hind-Smith, spokesperson for the cable industry said, "We regret very much the defeat of Flora MacDonald. She did contribute a great deal to the structure of the future of broadcasting and cable industries against considerable odds." Michael McCabe, president of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, who worked for Ms. MacDonald in Kingston during her early campaigns, also thinks that she made a contribution. "She tried to advance the cause of film distribution and the cause of broadcasting and she got more money for the CBC."

"She worked very hard," McCabe said, "and I don't think she achieved what she wanted to achieve, but I think she was headed in the right direction."

Doug Coupar, director of Communications for ACTRA, assesses the former minister this way:

"We get used to the fact that the ministry is a bit of a revolving door. Because the job requires a certain level of sophisticated expertise, we have to go through a learning curve with every new minister. In Flora's case the learning curve was very short and she had a really good grasp of the basics. She was definitely in there swinging. It would be my guess that she ran into a great deal of difficulty with the rest of the Cabinet. We felt her efforts in the ministry were frustrated repeatedly by the Cabinet."

Ms. MacDonald herself remains graceful, even cheerful in defeat. "I will greatly miss the mental stimulation," she said, "that is so characteristic of the department of Communications. That stimulation comes from not only the bureaucrats but from the many client groups it must serve, which, in themselves, are so creative, so ingenious, and at times so argumentative." She will be missed.

There is a great deal of speculation about who will replace her. In the interim, it is likely that the post will be assumed by a former minister in conjunction with other duties until the Conservatives have cleared the plate of their free trade agenda and a new cabinet is announced, probably in the new year.

Macerola says goodbye NFB, hello Lavalin

MONTREAL – Citing John Irving's 'Garp' – "Imagining something is better than remembering something" – François Macerola, film commissioner of the National Film Board of Canada, says he is prepared to leave the NFB on Dec. 1, 1988 and not look back.

Macerola's five-year mandate ends on May 29, 1989 but in March he will go to work for Prodevco Lavalin Inc. as the executive director of operations of a \$50 million film and television production centre on René Lévesque Blvd. This complex is scheduled to open in mid-1990.

"There should be no doubt about the viability of the private sector in the Canadian film industry," says Macerola.

"It's true that in a few years I might be singing a different song but, today, there is a lot of money from Telefilm and private investors and a lot of partners open to co-productions."

Macerola told *Cinema Canada* that he is ready for the private sector.

"I could have asked the minister to renew my term but after 10 years at the NFB, I'm ready for another challenge and the NFB is ready for another film commissioner."

Continued on page 42

Continued next page



National
Film Board
of Canada

Office
national du film
du Canada

NEWS

GRIERSON AWARD TO BRITAIN

Director Donald Brittain has been awarded the John Grierson International Gold Medal Award by the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers. The award recognizes the recipient's "significant technical achievement related to the production of documentary motion picture film."

According to the Society, the honour was bestowed on Brittain for "his many achievements as director, producer and writer of some of the most prominent documentary films produced in Canada."

During Brittain's 33-year career, he has directed many memorable NFB productions including: *Bethune, Ladies and Gentlemen: Mr. Leonard Cohen, Volcano: An Inquiry into the Life and Death of Malcolm Lowry, and Memorandum*. His films have been seen at all the world's major film festivals and he has been awarded over 70 international prizes. Three of the films which he wrote were nominated for Academy Awards. His most recent production, and most ambitious to date, is *The King Chronicle*, a three-part six-hour docudrama on the life of Canada's longest reigning Prime minister.

NFB TAKES FOUR ATLANTIC AWARDS

Four National Film Board productions took awards at this year's Atlantic Festival Atlantique in Halifax. Also, NFB editor Les Halman was honoured with the Pioneer Award, presented each year by the CBC to an individual who has contributed "pioneer work in the film industry in the Atlantic Region." Halman, who has been with the Board since 1956, is presently Supervising Sound Editor at the NFB in Montreal. In 1985, he received an award from the same festival for "his dedication and hard work in training young filmmakers in the Atlantic Region."

TWELVE GEMINI NOMINATIONS TO NFB

Twelve Gemini nominations have been picked up by the National Film Board this year including four for Donald Brittain's *The King Chronicle*. This NFB-CBC coproduction on the life of William Lyon McKenzie King drew an average audience of over one million viewers over its three-night telecast last April.

Both Gary Reineke and Sandy Webster have been nominated as best supporting actor for their

parts in this series. Other nominations for *The King Chronicle* are for Best Dramatic Mini Series and Best Sound in a Dramatic Program or Series.

Foster Child, the story of a young man's search for his roots, was nominated as the Best Documentary Program, and Gil Cardinal was nominated as Best Director of a Documentary Program or Series for the same film. Also competing for Best Director is William Hansen for his *Edge of Ice*.

Reckoning: The Political Economy of Canada, produced by John Taylor was nominated for the Best Information Series, and Kent Martin was nominated for one episode in the same series entitled *Part I - In Bed with an Elephant*. The nomination was for Best Writing in an Information/Documentary Program or Series.

Shooting Stars, a coproduction with Stein/McLean Productions Ltd. will compete in the Best Sports Program or Series category and was also nominated for Best Sound in an Information or Documentary Program or Series.

A nomination for Best Photography in an Information/Documentary Program or Series was awarded to Kent Nason for *The Lonely Passion of Brian Moore*. The Gemini Award ceremonies will be held in Toronto on November 30.

NFB Offices in Canada:

Headquarters - Montreal (514) 283-9253
Pacific region - Vancouver (604) 666-3411
Prairie region - Winnipeg (204) 949-2812
Northwest region - Edmonton (403) 495-3013
Ontario region - Toronto (416) 973-0895

National Capital - Ottawa (613) 996-4259
Quebec region - Montreal (514) 283-4823
Atlantic region - Halifax (902) 426-7350
plus offices in most major cities

MIFED 1988: disappointing

MONTREAL - Canadian buyers and exporters in film and television have returned from what has been described as a slow market at MIFED 1988, Oct. 23-29 in Milan, Italy.

Atlantis Releasing made its inaugural appearance this year among 15 Canadian

companies present. A distribution deal was closed with Funai Co. of Japan for the feature *Quarantine* produced by Apple Pie Pictures Inc. in Vancouver. Rights to all territories outside of Australia and the U.S. were acquired for *Island* directed by Paul Cox and scheduled for production in November.

Cinema Plus International sold video rights to South Korea for *Train of Dreams* produced by the National Film Board. The Montreal-based company also announced a renewed video distribution agreement with Trans World

Entertainment for all product in Canada.

Films Transit sold *A Corps Perdu* to Italy's Life Entertainment Co. and to Belgium.

The Italians also bought *Les Portes Tournantes* and *Hitting Home* from Films René Malo Inc.

Image Organization reported worldwide sales and strong interest in the U.S. for *Snakeater*, a Cinepix release starring Lorenzo Lamas.

In television sales, Films Crepuscule International sold *Konitz* and *Lonely Child* to 2DF Television in Germany and *Oscar Thiffault* to French Television.

CINEMA
CANADA

Trade News

Continued from previous page

Of his achievements Macerola says he would like to be remembered for the "quality and relevance" of the films that he shepherded through the NFB and for "developing stronger relations with the private sector."

As to whether he will be remembered for these things, Macerola says, "Only the future will tell if I have a legacy. There are some people who will be glad to see me go and who will say I sold my ass to the government and others will say I did a lot. The truth lies somewhere in between."

"I don't want to do a postmortem," says the departing film commissioner. "I would rather imagine something new than remember my time at the NFB."

He says the future of the NFB, especially in view of a free-trade deal with the U.S., will by necessity have to include increased overall funding.

"The government will have to increase the budgets of the public producers (NFB, CBC/RC) and keep supporting the private sector through Telefilm. Where the government is concerned, culture will have to become more than a dossier you use every six months to convince yourself or the Canadian public that it is important. Culture should be at the top of the list of important dossiers and made very important in the life of this country."

Although Macerola is careful not to become involved in the selection process of his successor, he has gone on record as supporting the idea of appointing the first female film commissioner.

"It would be interesting to see how the internal community would evolve and transform."

Marc Dorion, vice-president of the NFB Board of Trustees, says a three-member selection committee has prepared a list of 20 candidates from inside and outside the NFB. At press time none of these candidates had been contacted by the committee.

Dorion says an appointment by the prime minister, after recommendations have been approved by the minister of Communications, should not be expected until late January.

According to NFB insiders, one name frequently mentioned as a possible successor is Joan Pennyfather, vice-film commissioner and director of corporate affairs.

Pennyfather, who commends Macerola for his "tremendous" contribution to the NFB though a difficult time of cutbacks in government appropriations, told *Cinema Canada* that she has much respect for the job and that 50 years is long enough to wait for the appointment of a woman. She refused, however, to comment on her own candidacy.