

# ROUGH CUT

by Robert Rouveroy C.S.C.

## Leader

With considerable backing from my (more or less) devoted readers, I will attempt to bite the hand that feeds me, or at least gum it a little. Such endeavors have their obvious drawbacks for a freelancer and I must admit that I am more than apprehensive when I tell you which target I have selected this time.

It all began when I was completing a small assignment for a CBC production. I ran into Maurice French, the very able head of the CBC Film Services, and asked him if and when the CBC would review the fees and remunerations for freelancers. He replied that changes would be underway in the foreseeable future but that he did not know how much or what these changes would be. He expressed surprise that I was questioning these matters and informed me that he had not heard any other cameraman complain about them. I told him that maybe the other cameramen might have been afraid to bring these matters up, but Mr. French replied that it would be unthinkable that any cameraman could be penalized for expressing such views. This is of course good news, even if it does not particularly affect my position vis-à-vis the CBC film department. You see, since 1969 I have not had one call for freelance services from said department. The very few days a year I scrounge from the CBC come directly from producers who insist on my services when the Film Department has no staff cameramen available.

Anyway, it is a pity that Mr. French seems to be unaware of the feelings of the freelance cameramen in regard to the rate structure at the CBC. Therefore I'd like to refresh his memory on a brief, presented to the CRTC on February 4, 1974 by the Canadian Society of Cinematographers. Copies were made available to CBC management, and presumably some copies trickled down to the Film Services.

As is wont with such briefs, it disappeared totally within the maw of bureaucracy, never to be heard of

again. However, a few excerpts, updated, might be of interest. It starts off, thusly:

*"Declaring the urgent need for a mandate directing the CBC Film Service to consider Quality as the prime requisite in CBC film production*

and

*Outlining unfair policies and practices carried out by the management of the Film Services at CBC Toronto, as a result of this lack of direction."*

## Sound up

*"... the Corporation maintains staff personnel to provide for its projected minimum daily activities and uses freelance crews for its requirements above this level... an advantage of this arrangement is that a state of healthy competition should exist, between freelance film crews and those on staff, not simply in terms of how cheaply film can be made, but how well it can be produced. Unfortunately, in catering to those producers outside the Drama Department whose concern is with budget and journalistic content rather than visual quality, the CBC Film Service has created an atmosphere in which both staff and freelance cinematographers are forced to work in a way that may bring short term savings but inhibits the development of a better quality product, which in turn discourages the potential of film as a medium for television."*

## A-Track

*"... CBC Engineering will not permit the substandard production of video tape in order to comply with the desires of a producer whose aspirations exceed his budget. Film Services regularly assigns work to a cinematographer with the charge: 'Do the best you can with the limited time and facilities that this producer's budget allows.' This puts the cinematographer in the impossible position of having to shoot an individual sequence which might be acceptable to that producer but is not of that quality by which Engineering used to assure the long term development of its video work.*

*"(There is) an indication that the CBC can produce better quality and this is evidenced by the technical excellence of the CBC filmed dramas. The signi-*

*ficance here is that the Drama Producers make it very clear to the Film Services that quality, rather than economy, is demanded in film provided for them."*

## B-Track

*"The freelancer has to invest fifteen to twenty-five thousand dollars in equipment to service the CBC."*

(In 1976 these outlays exceed thirty thousand dollars for a modest equipment package, based, say, on an Arri BL and Arri S, a few lenses, tripods and other paraphernalia - R.R.)

*"In order to get film work from the CBC, a cameraman has to sign a letter of agreement wherein he takes the responsibility for hiring the crew, paying the crew, being liable for the quality of the work of his crew (which brings non-payment for unsatisfactory work), being liable for accidents and injury, absolving the CBC for such accidents and injury. Because of prevailing limited budgets, etc., freelance cameramen are denied assistants and electricians that normally would be in a crew. These categories are manned when internal CBC crews carry out similar work.*

*"The freelance cameraman then has the work of three people and bears a heavy work load, making it often impossible to deliver a product that answers the letter of the agreement."*

## C-Track

*"Many cameramen have no Union representation and hence are rendered vulnerable."*

(The I.A.T.S.E. union, local 644, has shown no interest in speaking to CBC management. The C.U.P.E. covers staff cameramen and in fact does a damn good job protecting their interests, but they are not interested in covering the freelance field - R.R.)

*"Film Service management, aware of this vulnerability, have used a 'take it or leave it' attitude, even denying the independent the right to negotiate for reasonable working conditions and rates of pay. Any individual cameraman who has protested conditions is subsequently rarely called for work."*

(This particular sentence is worded rather strongly. As I said at the

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beginning of the article, Mr. French has repeatedly and explicitly told me that such is not the case, and that no cameraman should be afraid to speak up if he has a beef with the Film Services - R.R.)

*"Fair and just increases in pay have not been made. For many years, when individuals have protested, management inferred that they would not do anything about the situation until pressure was brought to bear.*

*"After many battles with the (film service) department, many of our members just gave up. There is no way we can get redress for the past, but we criticize in the strongest terms a system that allows such a situation to persist over the years... We believe that if the CBC Film Services are given the same guide lines as Engineering with respect to quality, some of the ills of the past may disappear."*

**Dissolve**

These are some excerpts from a rather impassioned document submitted by the C.S.C. There is a list of fees and increases carefully assembled, over the period of 1961 to 1973. These are rather meaningless in 1976, but here are some figures I've dug up. Believe me, they are true (see table below).

Such are the hard facts of life that it isn't feasible for a cameraman to buy a new camerapackage and go into business for himself. Yet there is a glut of cameramen on the market. Every day's work that can be chiselled from the CBC and other outlets is hotly contended over. As a result, the CBC and others are making deals to get the best possible price. And we let that happen because we haven't yet learned to stop eating.

**Answer Print**

And so we see a steadily deteriorating quality in the film work presented on the CBC and other outlets. Some cameramen operate equipment that is literally held together with glue, spit and baling wire. But, as I remarked earlier, Mr. French promised me that changes are definitely contemplated in the foreseeable future and that changes are under advice. However, it looks to me that there is very little chance that those changes will faithfully reflect the enormous revaluation of the equipment.

Consider this. In 1967 the rental prices for camera equipment were based on about one percent a day of their value. Given the wear and tear on the gear on some assignments, like in the Far East, in war zones and the like, it was an adequate compensation.

Consider also that the soundman usually got about two percent for his gear as the electronic components are more delicate and are apt to suffer more breakdown. The lightingman might realize around eight percent per day because he had a heavy burden replacing lightbulbs.

For those among us who bought equipment several years ago, prevailing prices are not any more adequate as the cost of replacement gear is out of sight. Guess what an Arri SR or Aaton Beauviala would cost with, let's say, four magazines. Would you believe twenty-four thousand dollars?

A soundman plunking four to five thousand dollars down for a Nagra IV still gets \$25 a day, now realizing 1/2%. His Sennheiser 815 microphone, in bygone days valued at \$285 now will set him back around \$700. The rental stays the same, at \$15 a day. I don't pretend to know what a lightingman is up against, but you can bet your (non-existent) bottom dollar that his replacement bulbs have sky-rocketed out of sight.

**Release Print**

What will the CBC do in regard to these increases? I do not know and neither did Mr. French. He had a faraway and harried look on his face when we discussed these matters in the hallways of the fourth floor of the CBC building on 790 Bay street. I guess I felt sorry I had bothered him. You see, he had just discovered that someone swiped a 12-250mm zoom from a CBC filmcrew on location in Florida. It was bought, back in the sixties, for \$2,300. He now has the problem of digging up seven thousand eight hundred bucks to replace it. □

*(Equipment News continued from p. 17)*

"The small format videotapes have not grown the way manufacturers forecast several years ago. Nor have they 'taken over the world' as was predicted. They have had a respectable growth but today we feel that most of the large orders for tape units have been filled and the industry must now depend on orders for smaller numbers of units. Rather than replacing film, we think that videotape will continue to go hand-in-hand with film."

Already there are reports that Teldec's attempts to introduce video disc into Europe have not come up to expectations.

**Comparative Rates**

	1967	1973	1976
freelance cameraman	\$ 60 /8h.	\$ 72 /10h.	\$ 72 /10h.
F/L editors	\$ 56 /8h.	\$ 64 / 8h.	\$ 80 / 8h.
rental Arri BL	\$85	\$85	\$85
cost of Arri BL	\$8000	\$11,000	\$16,000
cost of 5.9mm lens	\$595	\$1150	\$1630
cost of 12-250mm	\$2800	\$4400	\$7800
rental of 5.9mm	\$15	\$15	\$15
rental of 12-250mm	\$35	\$45	\$45
cost of 12-120mm	\$590	\$1250	\$2930
rental of 12-120mm	\$15	\$15	\$15
cost of lightpackage	\$450	\$950	\$1330
rental of lightpack	\$42	\$42	\$35
cost of Arri S	\$2250	\$4100	\$5800
rental of Arri S	\$15	\$15	\$15
insurance camera	\$320	\$760	\$1125
O'Connor 50 cost	\$680	\$890	\$1280
O'Connor 50 rental	\$10	\$10	\$10
car mileage/cost/mile			
average consumer rep.	\$0.09	\$0.14	\$0.31
mileage for CBC	\$0.10	\$0.12	\$0.16