

by Teri Coburn

Born in Ottawa in 1940, Jean Lefebvre has been promoting Canadian films at festivals both here and abroad since 1966. Given the continuing growth of the Montreal, Toronto and Banff festivals, and our national representation in foreign countries, Cinema Canada met with him to discuss the importance of festivals in general, and their impact on this industry in particular.

Cinema Canada: You were at one time head of the festivals office at the NFB.

Jean Lefebvre: Yes. As a matter of fact the whole idea of the Board's participation in film festivals originated with one person: Lucille Bishop. Years ago at the Film Board she used to be distribution agent, and she was very interested in the critical, the qualitative side of film. The NFB was invited *pro forma* to countless film festivals around the world and people used to dump the invitations on her desk saying, "You figure a way out of it." So, she did that for maybe three or four years and then was transferred to Paris. And I kind of got the job.

By then of course the NFB had figured out that it might be a full-time job. But I had no secretary, nothing... so for a few years I went around selecting NFB films, begging the filmmakers to lend me their own prints of their films. I'd do the wrapping, the shipping, the customs forms myself, I'd bang out my own letters... Then I'd go after little budgets, on a festival-by-festival basis, to be able to do it. Out of that grew a sense that the NFB should have a film festivals bureau. And miraculously, in one boom year I managed to obtain a secretary. Through the NFB's mandate, the film commissioner being in charge of cinematography, we evolved into the body that was responsible for pre-selecting the Canadian films that would represent Canada at Cannes. Those were wonderful years! We used to have a committee of 10 members to select, out of three feature films, which ones would go - if any. In that particular selection our jurisdiction extended beyond the NFB.

At the same time the Canadian film industry was developing, particularly in Montreal. It was mostly NFB 'drop-outs' that were making films. Gilles Carle was doing a little film on the side, Claude Jutra... a lot of people were. So there was still a pretty close link between the Film Festivals Bureau and these people.

In about 1970/71 Gérard Pelletier, who was then Secretary of State, announced that he was going to develop a comprehensive cinema policy. It was then thought that there might be a call for a film festivals bureau to tend to the entire Canadian film industry. So I applied for the the job when it was finally posted, and I got it. I've been doing the same thing now since 1966. There was just a short hiatus around '68 to '70... At one point the NFB decided that it would be better for the development of my career if I branched out into something else, and I'd just about had it having puny budgets and that sort of thing. So I decided to become an NFB distributor. I

Jean Lefebvre

... on the fine art of festivals



● Jean Lefebvre, Director of the Film Festivals Bureau, in his office (beside him, a Polish distribution poster for *The Silent Partner*)

hated it! And I was terrible at it too. After about two years the NFB announced the re-opening of the Festivals Bureau post, so one day I sat down, banged out a three-page letter to Sidney Newman, single-spaced, saying that I would consider going back under the following conditions... Three days later I got a phone call from Sidney saying, how soon can you be here? I said, does that mean yes to all my conditions? And he said yes, but be here! One week later I was back at the Board doing it. That was possibly the only wonderful, major, administrative victory I've ever had! But I wouldn't try it now in central government. The place is so big nobody would even realize I'd left.

Cinema Canada: So when you joined the Film Festivals Bureau under the Secretary of State, you started in a newly created position.

Jean Lefebvre: Yes. Although it began at the NFB, we moved to the Secretary of State when the film policy was enacted in '71 or '72. As of last April we are now with Arts and Culture, part of the Department of Communications.

Cinema Canada: Is the new connec-

tion between the Festivals Bureau and the Ministry of Communications and Francis Fox a workable one?

Jean Lefebvre: Up until this latest Cabinet shuffle it was hard for everyone concerned, including the Minister, because he really had two very important and huge portfolios (Ministry of Communications and Secretary of State) to handle. Now of course he can devote more attention to us. And I'm hopeful that it will work out.

Cinema Canada: What exactly are the main aspects to your mandate?

Jean Lefebvre: There are two aspects to our mandate. It's very short. First, it's to do promotion/publicity to help further the distribution of Canadian films in Canada and abroad. Second, we organize and co-ordinate the official Canadian presence at film exhibitions in Canada and abroad.

Cinema Canada: Within that mandate your Bureau operates a consultative committee to select the Canadian films which will be recommended to the Cannes film festival. The committee used to be broadly representative, with actors, directors, producers, critics,

government reps, etc. Coinciding with Michael McCabe's direction of the Canadian Film Development Corp. the composition of your Committee changed radically to only two English and two French producers, along with yourselves. Was this a reflection of the new federal policies which were geared to bolster the commercial aspects of the industry?

Jean Lefebvre: No. The change in composition did not reflect those changes of policies. The only reason behind our limiting the number of people on the pre-selection committee was a practical one; the committee had become totally unmanageable. We were up to about 16 members and budgetarily it was enormous. Also, we realized that we at the Bureau have a certain feel for what a festival is looking for. But we don't want to be alone making the decision. So we said, let's limit the pre-selection committee, since the only part in the Cannes festival that requires pre-selection is the competition itself - not the Director's Fortnight or the critics' film week.

Cinema Canada: Given the former composition, the new make-up of the committee represents a pretty drastic change.

Jean Lefebvre: Well, it was necessary. Now the selection process of the Cannes festival is a lot more open than it was. In the past, Cannes wasn't really interested in Canadian films. The organizers made comments like, "Oh, don't choose more than six films, you decide". Anything to get us out of their hair. Now, although we haven't tested it yet, I'm sure that if we had eight really sensational films and we suggested them to Cannes, they'd come and look at them.

Cinema Canada: But having gone from directors and writers and such, to producers to make the selection...

Jean Lefebvre: I suppose we could have asked the film directors to be there. In fact we dropped film directors because we said they are not directly concerned, even if their film is selected. Participating in a festival like Cannes is very expensive and whether or not to participate is a decision only the producer can make. That's the primary input. No amount of screaming and carrying on by the director - unless a director carries a whole lot of weight, but that would be an exceptional circumstance - will ever find the money and the commitment from the producing company to be able to back up a film that has been selected for showing in Cannes. Also, the Directors' Fortnight is an event in Cannes which is directed to the directors.

Cinema Canada: Yes, but considering the actual screening and selection of the films to be recommended...

Jean Lefebvre: In other words, have we made a sort of demarcation saying the competition is for the producers and money people?

Cinema Canada: Yes, in terms of the influence that these people have over that selection. For instance, you may

have four producers in there, and some of them may have had directing experience, but obviously the way they screen films will be different from the way directors do. Is there not an imbalance in favor of producers?

Jean Lefebvre: I don't think so. The producers we had this year were very honest in their examination of the films. We don't ask for a point system. The only stipulation we put to the selection committee is to imagine the film being shown in the Grande Salle in the Palais des Festivals at Cannes. Would the audience shriek with laughter, would it applaud, would it love it, would it hate it, would it fall asleep or what? How would the audience react? The committee looks for six good films that can withstand that crowd of cynics at Cannes. Given the major decisions that had to be made as to which films were to be eliminated this year, the producers were also very sensitive to the financial interests that were behind these films. Mind you, no film was rejected on the grounds that it was so economically sound that it could stand it — make its way without the Cannes exposure. But every single aspect of a film was looked at when we arrived at our last decision... However, even if we didn't recommend a film, I believe that Cannes would agree to look at it, if it felt it was a strong enough one. As a matter of fact, there were producers, whose films were rejected this year, who phoned me up and said, "Would somebody's nose be out of joint if we just went ahead and sent it?" I said, "No, by all means, get any Canadian film in there. I don't mind." Our pre-selection system is merely to keep up our part of the bargain with Cannes.

Remember, we don't choose the members of the consultative committee. We ask the producers' association to choose them. Some of those producers were very busy but they gave up their time to come. I was really gratified at the level of discussion that went on about the films. These people may be producers and may be talking money and that sort of thing but believe me, when they got around the table discussing the films, they were discussing in critical festival terms the qualities and defects of each film.

Cinema Canada: There was a two-year period, '79-'80, when the Canadian presence at Cannes was co-ordinated by the CFDC and not, as had been the case previously, by the Festivals Bureau, is that right?

Jean Lefebvre: Well, no. The CFDC then was in charge of the Cinema Canada (not to be confused with the magazine) umbrella organization. We kept operating during that time as a separate entity within the Cinema Canada thing; limiting our action to the cultural side of the films that were participating. Ever since that particular period we have had a clear division between the CFDC and the Bureau, thank god; because up until then it had always been a problem. We had put more into marketing, less into cultural and vice versa. Now it's clear, the CFDC is in charge of marketing, we're in charge of festivals and culture. And we get along great with the CFDC on this. So, when we're talking about the administration of Cinema Canada at Cannes, we're talking about the over-all approach of this umbrella organization. We had something like four offices in which were the CFDC, the Festivals Bureau, the Quebec film institute and last year the Ontario government came.

Cinema Canada: So that kind of split suits you fine?

Jean Lefebvre: It suits me great, again because of this dichotomy. I feel very comfortable dealing with what I call the cultural promotion, the overall image of the Canadian cinema, as opposed to dealing with the nuts and bolts and having to say simultaneously, "Don't miss the latest author film, but have I got a \$10 million film for you to see!"

Cinema Canada: There are as many festivals as there are days in a year. Your other committee, the grant committee, must decide which of the many Canadian festivals to fund. Does your Bureau have a policy, with regard to Quebec for example, of funding only those festivals supported or approved by the provincial film agencies?

Jean Lefebvre: No, not really. The attribution of grants to film festivals in Canada follows several stages. Once we've studied all the requests for grants, we call in the representatives of the provinces in which the festivals will be taking place. We will have representatives from Quebec, representatives from Ontario, representatives from Alberta and that sort of thing. Now, these people who sit on the committee are allowed to and do participate in the discussions, only they don't vote. It gives us and them a comprehensive picture, not only of the amounts we are giving to the festivals, but of our priorities and their priorities with regard to the festivals taking place in the province under their jurisdiction.

It allows our grants to be complementary as opposed to creating duplication in some areas. The other people sitting on that committee are the representatives of the federal interests that are also approached by festivals for financing: External Affairs, Canada Council, National Film Board, CFDC etc. They are the voting members.

Cinema Canada: What if a festival came to you, from Quebec let's say, without other funding and without the support of its provincial institute?

Jean Lefebvre: We would look very seriously at a festival that had not convinced the granting authority of its own province of the necessity of its existence. I mean, I can't imagine a provincial authority that would refuse to fund a festival that is in line or that reflects the necessities of the filmmaking industry in that province.... We would ask the festival to substantiate to us that it served a need in the industry in its own province. If we felt it did we'd recommend a grant for it, realizing at the same time that we can never give a strong enough grant for any festival to operate on that alone.

Cinema Canada: The festivals have to look for funding elsewhere.

Jean Lefebvre: Yes. So, this is why, generally at least — and we've applied the rule fairly seriously in the criteria for applicants — we ask that they have other sources of funding. It's taken for granted that they will have funding from their own governmental sources; preferably, not only the provincial sources, but also their municipalities, etc. We can't carry the whole load ourselves. It's as simple as that.

Once a festival has proven itself it becomes eligible for a grant. No grant is awarded automatically. Grants are awarded — and this was our priority this year — according to the services the festival offers to further the development of the film industry. If it offers a

truly needed original service, then we give it a grant. But we give the grant to the festival not to the service. The whole idea of establishing a festivals grants program is to provide our growing film industry with an international base.

Cinema Canada: When the grant committee met to decide upon the allocation of festival funding this year, it was instructed that the question of the Montreal festival could not be discussed. Why was that?

Jean Lefebvre: Certain film festivals have really established themselves, in the sense that they are *pro forma*. Montreal this year had been the object of an in-depth study by a committee of three, from three levels of government: federal, provincial and civic. It had been the



● Lefebvre at Cannes in 1979

object of a whole slate of recommendations, so the decisions concerning the Montreal film festival had already been taken in the light of a much deeper study than the committee could ever have produced.

Cinema Canada: Did the committee feel that this had infringed upon its mandate?

Jean Lefebvre: No, it knew the context. And also, we are getting to the point where we have some festivals that are there.

Cinema Canada: What is the Bureau's annual budget?

Jean Lefebvre: We get \$350,000 (as of this year) which is exclusively for grants to Canadian film festivals, plus another \$350,000 which is the Bureau's operational budget... for sending filmmakers all over to festivals, sending over 1,000 films to over 156 festivals, organizing the pre-selection committee meetings, publishing the Cinema Canada yearbook, our directory...

Every so often a Canadian festival will say, "You're giving money to the Cannes film festival, why don't you give us some?" It's not the same. We don't give money to Cannes, we pay to send Canadian films to Cannes and to other festivals, and that's our grant fund. And, by law, we are not allowed to mix both.

We have asked for \$100,000 more for the grants budget for next year, but I'm 90% sure that we will not get it... Money's too tight. But we keep coming back with the same arguments every year because the situation is always the same; there's not enough money for film festivals. You could not organize one film festival on \$350,000 let alone give the major grant to 12 film festivals as we're doing right now.

Cinema Canada: You are the major grant giver then?

Jean Lefebvre: Well, not in terms of amount. But in terms of guaranteeing to the provinces that this particular festival is helping us, and guaranteeing to participants from abroad that the government is backing a particular event. Also, by the mere fact that we do give money to these festivals, External Affairs may be prompted to step in and help a little more, because they'll say, okay, the Festivals Bureau has done its homework. It creates a sort of credibility for the festivals. It also allows them to go around to private industry and say, the government is interested in us as a non-profit organization, would you be interested in helping us? Therefore it's safe to say that we are still the key grant.

But if we're really going to have a serious overall involvement in this sort of thing we would need a minimum of \$1 million. Also, we should be given permission to invest not only in the festivals but in the services that we insist these festivals provide to the development of the film industry.

Unfortunately, the very existence of the Festivals Bureau is a luxury of sorts. There are other priorities, which I fully understand and sympathize with. Which doesn't make my life any easier!

Cinema Canada: To what degree do you have a close liaison with the filmmakers in this country, outside the Montreal/Toronto nexus for example?

Jean Lefebvre: Up until a few years ago — when we could afford it — my assistant and myself used to go once a year for a week, say, to Vancouver. We'd ask the Pacific Cinematheque to call in every single Canadian film that they knew about and we used to sit down, look at the films and have long conversations with the filmmakers. We can't afford to do that anymore. It was a fairly expensive undertaking. I still remember our going there one year, having seen Peter Bryant's film *The Supreme Kid*. Peter came to us and said, "I'm having trouble with the blowup, something went wrong with the lab, and the lab now refuses to work any further with it." So Jacqueline (Brodie) and I decided to play the wise men from the East, the big guys from the government, and we went to the lab and started thundering around and thumping on desks and said, we're sure you can recuperate that print and print a good one. And they said, well, we'll give it a try, come back tomorrow. So we returned the next day and sure enough after our little screaming session with them, Peter Bryant suddenly got a 35mm version of his film. That was part of the joy of being able to do it... I miss that time.

Cinema Canada: Do you find that filmmakers from Newfoundland, for example, are making use of you?

Jean Lefebvre: Yes. Through going to Yorkton, and with the help of the Canada Council and people like that, more and more people are aware of our services. Also, we inform filmmakers of our existence through our mailing list. We now have 650 filmmakers and production companies to whom we send — sometimes up to three or four times a week — copies of festival regulations and our opinions of these festivals etc. We leave it up to them to decide whether they can participate. If their films are eligible they can send them in to us two weeks before the arrival deadline for the inscriptions when we group the entry into one single shipment. Somewhat of a factory approach, but it allows us to be of service to more people.

Cinema Canada: *Let's presume that I've made my own film, I'm lacking confidence, I really don't know the ropes, I'm a filmmaker not a business person and I come to you. What in fact can you do to help me?*

Jean Lefebvre: A lot of filmmakers send us their films and ask for our opinion. I'm very much afraid of that situation. I do it as a service, but what do you tell a filmmaker who really believes in his film when his film is not of festival quality?

Cinema Canada: *The cold hard truth?*
Jean Lefebvre: If you do, the logical answer is, "How do you know, you've never made a movie?" But I do know, I've been 15 years in festivals. Still, we don't want to discourage them too much. Lately we've taken to telling people quite fairly, honestly, what we think of their films in terms of festivals, but we leave open the fact that we may be wrong, that there's nothing we'd love more than to be wrong. And we have been.

Cinema Canada: *And if it's a good film, I understand that you can assume some of the cost for that film?*
Jean Lefebvre: Any film that is eligible for a festival, that is sent to us with the entry form complete, all the proper documentation, etc., we will ship for the filmmaker anywhere in the world except North America... But I wish filmmakers would take the time to read festival regulations. A lot of them don't. Often the film is not eligible simply because of the production year. Once a film is two years old it's no longer eligible for festivals.

Cinema Canada: *In addition to that shipping service, do you provide subtitling or dubbing?*
Jean Lefebvre: No. We purchase, for use in film festivals, certain films which fall under very clearly defined policy areas. For example, if a feature has been selected by a major film festival like Cannes, Venice, Berlin, etc., and subsequently garners enough invitations so as to monopolize the print for three months more than its participation in that major film festival, then we buy a print for festival use. We subtitle it in the other official language of the country and the print remains in our possession. It is strictly for use in festivals and it is never shown without obtaining prior permission from the producer and from the person who holds the rights for the film over the territory where we are sending it. We do the same, although much less, for shorts and documentaries: we will buy a maximum of three shorts or documentaries over the course of one year.

Cinema Canada: *How many foreign festival directors approach the Bureau and how many tend to by-pass you when looking for films for their festivals?*
Jean Lefebvre: That's a good question. Our Bureau has a reputation abroad of being a very thorough one. We're not like some government bodies which are trying to sell a particular image of their country and are therefore being very selective as to the films they show. We show everything that is sent to us — the good and the bad — to the festival directors. They come here and we take over their lives, literally, for three days. We rent a cinema, we put out a call for the films and for documentation of these films, we gather all the documentation

we can on all the entries and give a copy to the festival director, so that he or she can study it during the few hours that they have free. Then we lock them up in a screening room, from nine in the morning until sometimes 12 or one o'clock a.m. and show them the films end to end. Very few countries are either equipped to do that or bother to do that. So, because of that, the great majority — 98% of the festivals — come to us.

The only ones that don't really come to us are the paranoid ones; the ones who say, they're government, they must be the equivalent of the Canadian CIA. They call their own little friends and arrange film screenings between them, etc. But to a certain extent, they're working against themselves, giving them-

The Film Festivals Bureau ensured the Canadian participation in 156 film festivals in 1980 with 1268 Canadian film entries. At these festivals, Canadian producers had 964 films screened and won 242 awards. The Bureau, in cooperation with other government departments and agencies, organized 11 special prestige screenings involving 102 feature films and 15 shorts. Once again, the Bureau set up the marketing and press offices at the Cannes and Berlin film festivals, to promote and help sell Canadian films. The Bureau also administrated \$250,000 in grants, which were distributed to 11 Canadian film festivals. Finally, the Bureau published its annual Cinema Canada catalogue, containing complete, bilingual information sheets on the 59 Canadian feature films produced during the year. The catalogue was distributed to over 2,000 international film critics, distributors and buyers, as well as to 200 Canadian embassies and commercial missions around the world.

selves a lot of work because by the time they've selected the films, these filmmakers will call us up so that we'll ship the films over for them to the festival... So we're still in control of the thing to a certain extent. If people want to go about it that way, fine, because my motto is, get as many Canadian films abroad as possible. That's what our image depends upon.

Cinema Canada: *How does the unconventional nature of the film industry affect your working within a government department?*
Jean Lefebvre: Well, here we are in this huge department whose mandate is primarily to develop policy, a little island of very crazy people who are doing very material things — such as shipping films, buying films... There's no provision in government, like space allocation for shelves for films. Just asking for shelves for films is quite an experience! In terms of government we're "operational" as opposed to "policy." And being operational is very hard when you're dealing within a government department. This of course raises a problem that started at the NFB and is now on-going; that is, where should the Film Festivals Bureau really be? After 15 or 16 years in this position I can say, with a fair degree of certainty, that there is no established place right now, in government, where the Bureau could really be comfortably integrated. I think the closest we can get to this is our current set-up withing the Arts and Culture sector;

because we definitely have a primarily cultural mandate.

Cinema Canada: *You must have to cope with some enormous bureaucratic headaches.*

Jean Lefebvre: Well, let's put it this way. Our means of operation here is devoted two-thirds towards internal justification and one-third to really doing our external work. This is the nature of the beast. We can't fight it. It's not justifying what we're about. Everybody knows what we're about. What we're justifying is even more frustrating. For example, when we want to buy film cans it's a three-month deal, with memos to everybody explaining why we need film cans, etc. Now try to imagine this particular sort of situation when you're preparing the Canadian participation at Cannes! It's an exercise in visiting Kafka's castle. It's absolutely incredible! And whenever we do, finally, get to the end of the Cannes film festival, we normally sit down and say, not, "Boy, are we glad we've had a good year," or a bad year; our real impression is, "Boy, are we glad we managed to get the budget in time, our permissions in time, our submissions to the Treasury Board in time," so that we could throw the little beach party for the press to promote a Canadian film that's been selected. That's our major victory.

Another example. In government, whenever you establish a contract you must make a call for tenders. Okay, now we have certain Canadian films that are selected by major festivals. What we want to do is guarantee the participation of the filmmaker of a given film, because by his presence he will generate a lot of copy, not only about his film but about Canadian cinema. Now, to be able to send a filmmaker there we're not entitled to give grants, or that is, travel grants. We have to hire the filmmaker, under contract, to do publicity for the Canadian film industry. So we go downstairs to Contracts and Administration and they say, well you didn't put out a call for tender... Well, there is no call for tenders because it has to be *this* guy and *this* guy alone! And they can't figure that out! And this is only one example of many. So we go back up and write a three-page memo why this person is the only person who can go, and therefore would they please waive the call for tender as part of the contract procedure.

If one wanted to be really down-to-earth practical about it we should wish to be attached to an agency. But if we were working with an agency I'm afraid that we might eventually be sucked into the agency's priorities and, the place being so small, again we would either look like a revolutionary group within the church, or we would fall in step with the agency and really vary from our course.

Cinema Canada: *Unless you were your own agency.*
Jean Lefebvre: Oh, well that would be too heavenly! And if the government started doing that there would be countless agencies that the government couldn't even keep track of. Besides, very few countries can even say that they have this sort of set-up.

Cinema Canada: *How does the attitude of senior management affect you, if at all?*
Jean Lefebvre: Above us, in senior management, people come and go constantly. Whenever, for example, a new senior manager comes in and visits ad-

ministration he asks, "Do you have any problems with any particular sector?" Well, the Film Festivals Bureau is a small area, but it takes up a lot of our time. There are departments which will have one major expenditure over 10 years, like getting a satellite together and putting it up or something. But that requires exactly the same kind of contracts that we need to send filmmakers to the film festivals. So we keep hitting administration with contracts for amounts so ridiculous compared to these mega-sections — and we're giving them just about as much work... If one had to tote up the total number of requests coming from us to pay for the shipment of one film — you see, we've dealt with over 1,000 films last year; they would have to deal with 1,000 requests twice, once to bring the film in and once to return it. We keep them very busy. They know what we're about but they're not too sure that everything we're doing is kosher.

So every time a new senior manager comes in we always feel that there is towards us — I don't know, I may be paranoid — a sort of leerness. I'm not referring to my direct manager, but really senior people, who are not really into film festivals and who don't understand the implications of what we're doing. Automatically they become very circumspect in dealing with us, which means that every three, four, or five years we have to move back to square one, to studying the mandate of the Bureau and rejustifying our existence instead of proceeding with an evolution that should have taken place over 15 years... We would like to do a whole lot more for shorts and documentaries, for example, but because of budget restrictions, etc. we can't. Features are only the tip of the iceberg, so it's frustrating.

Cinema Canada: *Speaking of frustration and the independent sector outside of shorts and documentaries, there is what you could perhaps call a 'national' cinema and an 'international' cinema in Canada. National cinema as being Alligator Shoes for example and international cinema as being Tribute, or whatever. The national films tend to be popular in some European countries because they reflect aspects of Canadian life that are not generally known, that are not carbon copies of American life. It's an insight for them and a cultural learning experience. Although those films often have trouble getting distribution they're fairly well accepted critically. The international films may pick up distribution, often do, and they're seen by much wider audiences. But do the national films ever make their money back, or are they constantly relegated to a kind of back-seat position from a distribution point of view?*

Jean Lefebvre: Well, that question hurts. It touches upon the reason why the Canadian government is backing an office such as this, so that we will give these films a fighting chance. It's obvious that when you have an author film; unless it's a multi-million dollar production that really speaks internationally — I'm thinking of a Fellini or a Bergman — you're right, the films are headed for a very limited distribution. It's only through exposure that these films can hope to find money — and not to recoup during the first two or three years, but to recoup eventually over 20 years if the filmmaker gets established.

A nice example of that is Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's movies. I'm sure Jean-Pierre

doesn't expect to make a fortune out of each film. What he wants is to have enough money left over to be able to make another movie, and maybe in 20 years some of his films will start bringing in their costs. That's basically all he can hope for. The thing is, festivals are incredibly useful in being able to publicize and create a public for these films. The most spectacular examples of the strength of festivals is Herzog and Fassbinder and the New German cinema... If it wasn't for festivals none of the New Wave German filmmakers would be where they are today.

Cinema Canada: In contrast to many foreign countries whose films must represent a certain political persuasion, Canada appears to be fairly liberal.

Jean Lefebvre: Yes, it's surprisingly liberal. I only once had problems with a film. And not because the film wasn't good - god knows, it was a marvellous film - but I wanted to find out if there would be any political fallout, and that was *Les ordres*, years ago when we sent it to Cannes. I sent it to the minister so that he'd be prepared if there was political fallout. He looked at it and was enthused by the film. He said, no, by all means go ahead, don't worry about that. So, in that respect we're very lucky.

Our biggest problem in Canada stems from the fact that we're not very politicized, we're not tuned in or sensitive to, say, the Europeans' political viewpoints. For us, the left is being a small-"I" liberal. The right is being Reagan. Whereas in Europe the right is being Hitler and the left is being a little more than Communist... Because of this we occasionally get films that are sent more out of innocence than anything else into a politically sensitive situation. I won't try to hide the fact that for example, if you participate in Moscow or in Leipzig, your film is going to be analyzed from a political viewpoint. Forget the qualities of your film, it will not be judged from that perspective. If you have a film that denigrates the West, if you have a film - whether intentionally or not - that makes us look like clods, they'll select it; they'll love it. If you have a film that makes us look good they won't even select it - or if they do select it they'll show it out of competition in a cinema five miles away

Cinema Canada: My particular bias is towards the political films that come in from other countries, *El Salvador* and *Iran*, for example, and they are terribly anti-North American in general... I'm equating Canada with the States in this context, but that's how they see us.

Jean Lefebvre: But in international cultural terms there are fashions with regards to politics; and right now America is out. It's been out since Vietnam. And unfortunately, our being North American easily throws us into that category. I remember a few years ago we sent a short film, among others, to the Moscow film festival because it was a good little documentary on a young ballet student. During the last three minutes of the film the kid is being interviewed and he says that he dreams of being another Baryshnikov. They refused the film on the grounds that Baryshnikov was named in the film. Now they told us this off the record, but a festival that would do that will have much deeper and far-ranging political views over a lot of other films. This is why I now counsel a lot of people as to the quality of certain festivals. I'm not say-

ing that people should *not* participate in these festivals, as long as they know ahead of time what they're in for.

Cinema Canada: Given your perspective on foreign film industries do you think that Canada has a clearly defined film policy?

Jean Lefebvre: Yes. Definitely. There's been a lot of hue and cry about the capital cost allowance system, and right now, the entire film industry is focused on it. That's unfortunate. I think the CCA should be designed to help those films that are trying to be Canadian as opposed to being applied indiscriminately.

Cinema Canada: Do you think it's doing that?

Jean Lefebvre: Yes. When you look at the more recent limitations that have been imposed on the points system, films will have to be more Canadian in content, look and feel. And that's the basic purpose of the program.

Cinema Canada: In theory, yes. What about in practice?

Jean Lefebvre: Yes, for heaven's sake. Otherwise we would have either a state that is totally "dirigiste"... or a state which couldn't care less about the development of the industry. I think that the Canadian approach is a sane one, in that we are "dirigiste" when we demand so many points for Canadian content etc., but at the same time we're leaving space for creativity. The Canadian government has tended over the years to develop services as the need arose, according to the way the industry was developing... But the industry is still trying to find its own way. Now, I'm fully aware of all the confrontations there are about Canadian content as opposed to the films that will make money and develop an industry base, etc. Well, I agree with both. Whether we like it or not, we have to go back to the old definitions; film is both a cultural and a commercial product, and unfortunately it's always been an uncomfortable marriage. It always will be... Films by nature carry that dichotomy.

Cinema Canada: As does the country! Speaking of "uncomfortable marriages" and dichotomy, there is the nagging question every year of whether or not Canada can really justify two major film festivals.

Jean Lefebvre: Let me put it this way. If I had my druthers - I never will, but if I had - I would like for Toronto to take place one year and Montreal the next... They would both get double the amount we give them and to my mind it would be much too perfect a solution to be possible.

Cinema Canada: The complications for foreigners wishing to attend must be enormous when they take place only 10 days apart from each other. And from the Bureau's point of view there must be a lot of competition and antagonism. Do you think that the existence of two major festivals undermines the Canadian context?

Jean Lefebvre: No. I think it reflects the Canadian context. And we're not talking about bilingualism, biculturalism or anything like that. Festivals tend to gravitate - and this is all over the world - around the centers of production. We have two established centers of production, and very active ones: Montreal and Toronto. If Toronto stops existing there will be another festival created

immediately after. If Montreal stops existing one of the little peripheral festivals in Montreal will suddenly develop into the Montreal film festival. It's a natural state.

The industry is still building itself, and until it has reached the point of full development we won't know which of the two centers are most important. Not only in terms of money but in terms of turn-out, quality output and everything else. Suppose one of the centers turns out to be a real industry base and the other one becomes a cultural base? There will be a call for two festivals of a different nature.

Cinema Canada: Given your global perspective of Canadian film in relation to foreign film, how do we compare?



● "I'm lucky if I get to see one film at any given festival." (Cannes '81)

Jean Lefebvre: Well, this year is our best year ever... From a qualitative point of view I'm just overjoyed by the films this year - films like *Heartaches*, *Ticket to Heaven*, etc. It's been a fabulous year. We've never had so many good films. This is really the first year where our Cannes pre-selection committee really had to anguish over which films to recommend, because we have a limit of six. And there were a lot more than six that were good. For the first time, we didn't have just a minimum of six films really popping out, we had a lot of good films. And also, this year's production crystallized for us a problem we've been feeling for a long time - English-Canadian films tend to be overlooked by foreign film festivals, because in their minds, these films look "American". This year it really infuriated us because a lot of these films only look "American" to the extent that English Canada is North American, but no more than that.

Take *Heartaches* for example. We were so furious at Cannes because they liked it, but just not enough. It was close to being selected, but it wasn't. We were very disappointed. My assistant Jacqueline Brodie and I have given ourselves five years to develop a promotional plan to revalorize, or valorize, in the eyes of foreigners, the English-Canadian context. It's been easy for Québécois films because in the minds of foreigners they don't look American, they don't have any other look. But the instant you're dealing with English-Canadian films there is this very peculiar attitude. I think it stems more from a lack of information as to what constitutes English-Canadian culture than from a political stance. And this is going to be our prime objective in the future. Until now there was always some validity to the attitude that the majority of the anglophone features seemed to be bending

over backwards to look American. But this year it's not true. These films have a truly English-Canadian - as opposed to Québécois - film context, look and feel to them.

It is harder for us to obtain an English-Canadian film for a festival showing if it has already found an American distributor, for instance, than it is to obtain a film from Quebec. Over the next five years, we are going to have to count on the strong co-operation of Toronto-based producers to allow us to show their films as Canadian, in a Canadian context, so as to develop world sensitivity towards things English-Canadian, if you will. This is a fight we can't win on our own; we've got to be able to obtain the films first.

Cinema Canada: Does the cultural mandate of the Bureau limit the sort of films you're interested in?

Jean Lefebvre: You know, two years ago we were very gung-ho on culture. We didn't fight with producers for them to show us their films. If they said, "No, it's a commercial film, it's not for you," we let it go at that. But I still remember once, when I had an hour to lose at the CFDC in Montreal, there were all these cassettes of Canadian films, and I said, "My god, there are a lot I haven't seen"; so I fished out *Death Weekend*. Cinépix had said, "No, no, no, it's commercial, you wouldn't want it." I was furious at Cinépix because it's a very well-made film. It was made at the height of the horror-movie boom and, taking that into consideration, the film was very good! We could have placed it in horror film festivals, in exploitation film festivals, and it would have won all kinds of awards...

Cinema Canada: But isn't there a point where one side or the other becomes top-heavy?

Jean Lefebvre: This is what I'm saying. And I wish your readers would take that into consideration. This office is not only after the really heady, cerebral stuff, we're after good films, period. And there is nothing wrong with a well-made horror film. You need just about every kind of movie if you hope to have any kind of industry. Good horror films, good violent films, even good sex films. And good author films. Yes, you need a good selection.

Cinema Canada: One last question. Some would see your job as an enviable one - going to festivals, screening films... How do you see it?

Jean Lefebvre: Well, let's put it this way. Item one, I travel too much; item two, I don't get to go to enough festivals to be professionally satisfied - and I'm not talking about seeing films. I go to about four festivals a year abroad. I'm lucky if I get to see one film at any given festival. Because of the nature of my job I don't really go to a festival I go to a film convention. I run after people, not films.

Cinema Canada: And you're not burnt out after 15 years?

Jean Lefebvre: I hate airports... and suitcases. But no, apart from that, I'm going to say something silly, I think I've found my calling! And god knows, I'm still as motivated as I was when I started.

Cinema Canada: So the cause of Canadian film is worth the effort then?

Jean Lefebvre: It's one of the most exciting causes I've ever known! It really is. ●

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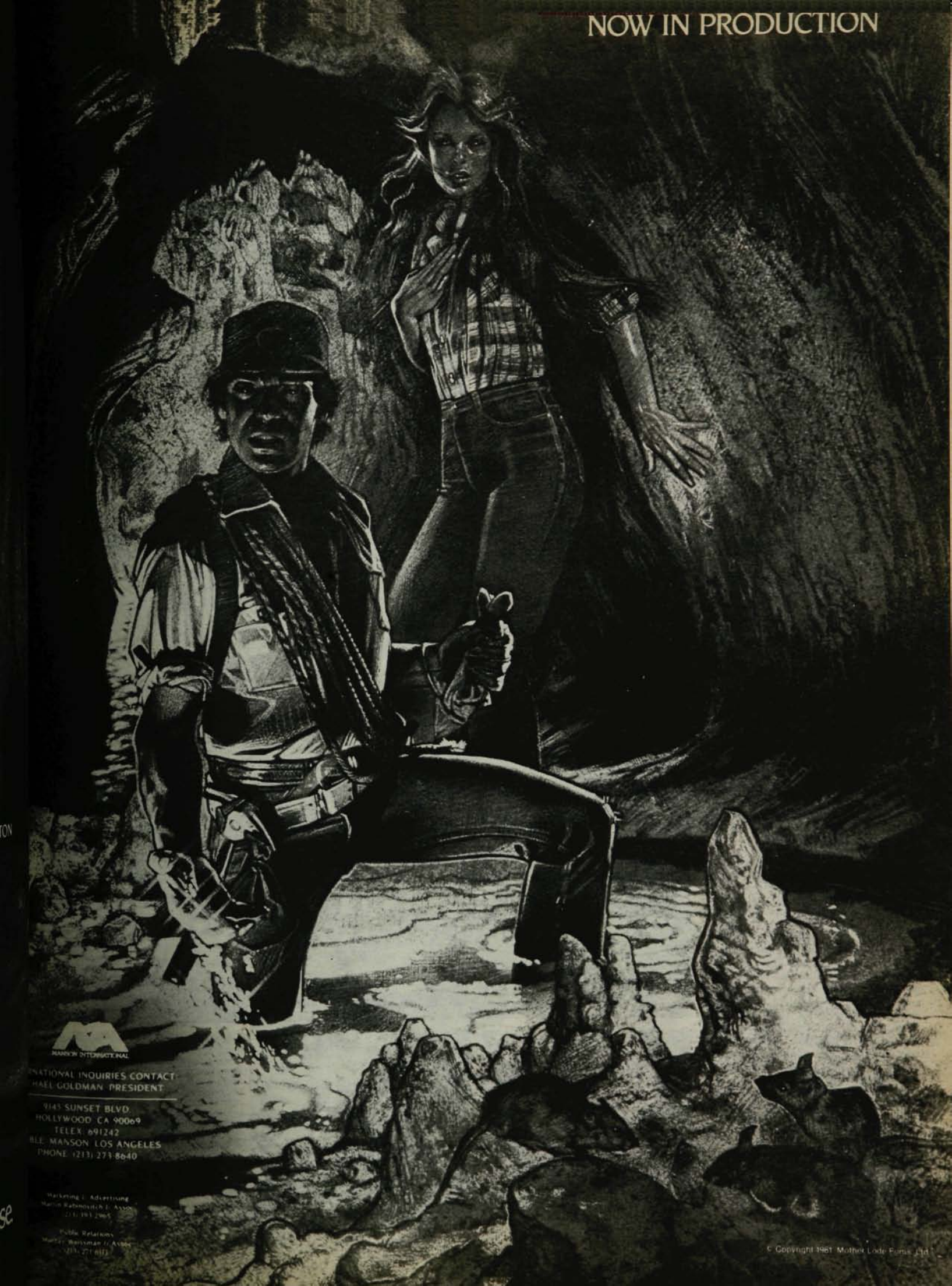
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