

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre

Flowers to Cannes

by Barbara Samuels

Once again, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre will represent Canada at Cannes as his film *Les fleurs sauvages* is screened in the Directors' Fortnight. With 17 features to his credit since 1965, Lefebvre is Quebec's most prolific filmmaker, and one of Canada's most regular ambassadors abroad.

Below are two separate interviews with Lefebvre. In the first, Barbara Samuels speaks to him about his most recent film, and production conditions at present in Quebec. The second is reprinted from the British Film Institute Dossier No. 13, entitled "Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: the Quebec Connection." In it, he addresses himself to the question of national cinema and to the making of his own films.

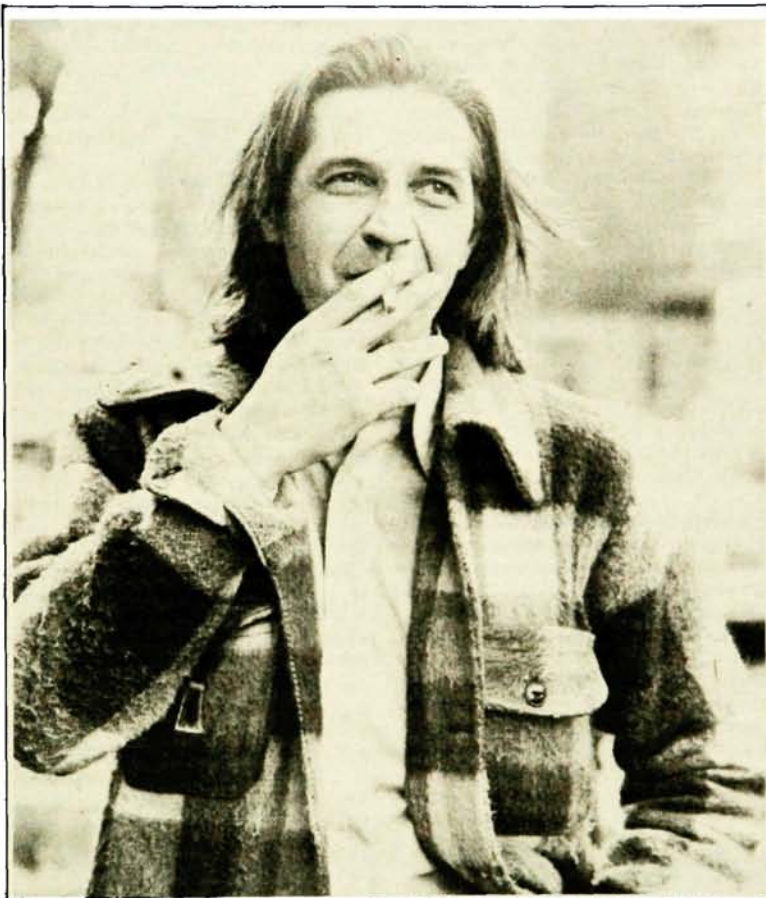
Cinema Canada: The story line of *Les fleurs sauvages* is very classic, very simple: you've dealt with the generation gap between an adult woman and her aging mother. What drew you to the subject matter?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Well, two years ago - summer of 1980, I think - I was very discouraged. The situation was rotten in Quebec, on the economic level, the human level. All those big films had transformed the spirit of the industry. It wasn't what it had been when we were making films 20, or even 10 years ago. So I decided I was going to give up filmmaking. But it's like wine. When you're used to drinking it, and you like it a lot, the taste just lingers somewhere inside you.

For two years, I'd had the chance to see a lot of mothers and daughters - my mother-in-law, the mothers-in-law of some friends. And then there was my own kid, eight-years old at the time, and his circle of friends, and it was a funny concentration in time and space. We had a lot of discussions at home about generation gaps.

I had an idea that I'd like to make a film about it. So I called Marthe Nadeau and asked her if she wanted me to write her a script. And then I did the same thing to Michèle Magny. Of course, the boy in my mind was always Eric Beauséjour, who'd played Paolo in *Avoir seize ans*. It was obvious that I'd ask Guy Dufaux to do the camera, and Josée

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Beaudette to be my assistant. First, I wanted to have a crew of friends, and then I'd draft the script.

Cinema Canada: You're dealing with a tale of non-communication between generations, and yet there are very close ties in the family you portray. Michèle and Pierre seem to be an ideal couple, beautifully balanced. The children give the unit another kind of equilibrium, and there's a different balance between Marthe and her grandchildren. And it's all set against an idyllic landscape, a gorgeous countryside; the whole thing's very pastoral. Is it supposed to be taken on a literal level?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Yes and no. It depends. I don't think there's any equilibrium possible between a man and a woman unless there's an equilibrium between them and the people around them. Pierre says at one point: "C'est la photo qui l'a déniaisée, qui a été son ouverture au monde." So Pierre can have a relationship with Michèle that's an extension of his relationships with other people, and vice versa.

Some people might think there's an autobiographical aspect in there, be-

cause it looks like the relationship Marguerite (Duparc) and I had, and especially because the film was shot in her house. And our relationship was possible because we had relationships with 'le monde ambiant.' I would have found it impossible to live with someone as one entity, feeding my entity. I don't believe in 'le couple ferme' at all; it's just impossible. And to me, those children are real children. They're the opposite of the child in *Les bons débarras*. She was a child coming from film, not life. I'm not judging *Les bons débarras*. I'm just saying I made a different choice. In a way, it's the first highly realistic film I've ever done. In another way, it's not at all realistic.

Cinema Canada: There's a degree of stylization in the film: the black and white sequences you've intercut with all that vivid colour, and then the flower symbolism. You've really "bookended" the film with the image of those wild flowers.

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: It's funny, because I knew I had the script when I figured out that flower sequence in the room. It gave me the ending, which gave

me the basis for the film. When Simone says to Michèle that the reason she made bouquets of wild flowers in the past was because wild flowers were all they could afford, it's really very cruel. There's misery there, and a certain amount of guilt. But the flowers also end it positively, and I'd like the film to provoke some thought between people and their families on that level, to help them work through their relationships.

I want a positive film very badly. I wrote in my script at the beginning that to re-show and restate that there's a generation gap would only make the problem worse, and the margin I gave myself to explore the real feeling was the black and white sequences. But I wanted the positive aspect to come across strongest.

Cinema Canada: In terms of the format, you've given the story a very special treatment.

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Yes, I almost wanted to use a dramatic line close to a soap opera, but I chose to stop that line every time there was a danger of really falling into soap opera. One of the ways I did that was to treat the film as a chronical. So all the situations had to be very clear. I wouldn't say 'intense', nothing's really intense in the film. It's very impressionistic, very 'en touche'. And by using that chronical form, I gave each day a different mood, a different style. One day even looks like a documentary, that party scene at the *Beaudrys*. So you had none of the usual conclusions you get in that kind of story. I didn't want to treat the subject on a 'psychological' basis. I didn't want to be very clear about the reasons for that gap, or the possibilities of bridging it. So I chose a form that was totally open, just showing pieces of life.

I'm very concerned with the problems of forms as related to subject, and the subject giving us that form. I wrote at the beginning of my script "un film pour que les générations qui ne se parlent ni ne s'écoutent puissent quand même entendre et voir ce qui pourrait se dire." Meaning that for people who don't speak to each other, the film is just a key, an unlocking of a door to possible communication between them. That's always been an obsession for me, that possible relationship between an audience and the screen. Leaving some space for reflection, not spelling everything out.

Cinema Canada: Has that audience remained primarily a Quebec one for you?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Yes, I want to share the experience of the film with the public here in Quebec. I'm trying to make a film that Québécois would like.

First and above all other audiences.

It's normal that Québécois were having some problems - and still are having them - with some of the films we're making here, because we're so brainwashed by format. I always think of the time my mother was terribly ill, back in 1960, and she asked me to take her to *South Pacific* for the third time. I wanted to say to her: "I won't take you to that shit; that's precisely the kind of filmmaking I'm against," but of course I simply took her to the film. I thought: what kind of answer could I give my mother? My answer has been my films.

Les fleurs sauvages is a way to make films here. At \$340,000, it's a direct response to people who are interested in making films about themselves, in talking about Quebec, and doing it our way. It's like cooking. You don't need a thousand bucks to make a good meal. I think our recent history proves that the more money you have, the less imagination you seem to put in.

Cinema Canada: But if your public has been trained to accept the *South Pacific* format, how do you sell them *Les fleurs sauvages*? It's a very leisurely-paced picture, no cross-cutting at all, a lot of tableau scenes and slow pans. Isn't there a certain limitation on the kind of audience you can reach with that form?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: I don't think so. *Les fleurs sauvages* has an easier form than *Les dernières fiançailles*. That film initially had problems getting started - especially here - but two years later, it was sold around the world. I don't think you make something accessible just by using one film language.

Les fleurs sauvages isn't as slow as *Les dernières fiançailles*, and there's a very practical reason for that. When I first approached Marthe Nadeau to play the mother - she'd acted in *Les dernières fiançailles* - she said: "*Les dernières fiançailles* was made nine years ago. I'm nine years older now. I can't do those long takes. I tire too easily, and my memory's not very good." So that gave me a key to the format.

The film's built like a mosaic. That's how I wanted to make it accessible - on every dramatic level. That's part of what

we lost here in Quebec over the last ten years. I had to relearn more direct, simple forms. The kind of structure I'd used in '73 on *On n'engraisse pas les cochons à l'eau claire* and *Les dernières fiançailles*.

I think the business mentality changed the form of Quebec cinema. If you look at most of the films shot in the last five years, they all have that tendency to be 'straight' pictures. *L'affaire Coffin*, *Les beaux souvenirs*, *Cordélia*; they all tended to look like "films." I think filmmakers now have a very limited idea about dramatic film, and I shared this problem. So I set out to make a very positive film, a reaction against the desperation of the current situation. We all tried to make something of beauty and simplicity.

Cinema Canada: You had an amazingly short shooting schedule - 15 days - and you worked in 16mm, and yet the film isn't restricted by either of these factors.

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: It's a small film, and at the same time, it's a big film. The subject was so simple, so non-dramatic, in a way, that I wanted to give the picture a very special dimension. I think of film as music, really, as a movement in time and space that starts and ends. A very sensuous flow. So I asked Guy not to do photography, but painting. He made some tests, and finally chose to filter everything with an 81A brown filter that brings up skin tones, all the browns and reds. It also kills the green. Because the most difficult thing to shoot in 16mm is landscape in July. It's so thick and green.

Cinema Canada: When Eric is walking through the forest at one point, there's direct sunlight on the grass, and the trees, and yet the green doesn't bleed all over the place. It's so controlled.

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Well, that's Guy's genius. We also shot with super high-speed Zeiss lenses, and almost all the film was shot at 1.5, which is totally non-Hollywood. The lighting was incredibly important. Not one scene is directly lit. It's all *clair-obscur*, all indirect. The interiors were lit from outside, with HMIs. Perfect daylight. Guy

exercised total control over the negative.

I think I've given up 35mm, first because it's too expensive, and second, because I think the most likely market worldwide is TV. So I prefer to have a good 16mm print and then make a blowup. The 35mm blowup is beautiful; I can't believe my eyes. And besides, 35mm is wonderful, but can you name three good theatres in Montreal where you can see a decent projection? On top of that, most of the copies in theatres are made from internegatives, which are usually not as nice as blowups from 16mm. And then they sell 16mm reduction prints to TV, and you're watching the film at home, and suddenly your image goes green. And I've had bad experiences making slash reduction prints from 35mm subtitled copies to reach the English market. I mean, the copy of *Rimbaud est mort* is just horrible, so green. It's not what the film could have been in 16mm. So I've covered that problem now by budgeting for a 16mm English subtitled print of *Les fleurs sauvages*. I intend to do that all the time.

Cinema Canada: It must be a little ironic to you that the only Canadian feature going to Cannes this year had an entire budget that would probably just cover coffee money on one of the big features.

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Well, it's been like that since we started. It's all those little, so-called 'cultural' films made in Quebec that kept the Canadian Film Development Corp. alive, and made all those big productions possible. And when the big ones came in, the little ones were pushed aside. It's ironic to see the way things are swinging back to the way they were.

Cinema Canada: L'Institut québécois du cinéma reacted to the changed situation through *Le Plan quinquennal*. How do you think the new financing scheme will affect you?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: I think *Le Plan* is a kind of punishment. As though parents have allowed their kids total run of the house, and they suddenly find the kids are too undisciplined. So they say: "O.K. From now on, you'll obey us. Shoes off before entering the house,

beds made every morning..." whatever. I think it's very dangerous. I think a major problem here - both in Quebec and in Canada - is that we haven't any measures to make producers, young or old, really take risks. For example, "la prime à la qualité" [a prize based on merit] would be a very important measure here, the way it's been in Sweden... Now we simply have two monuments, the CFDC and L'Institut, who control everything. And I really look at it as a kind of punishment. And we're always yelling at L'Institut and forgetting the CFDC, which has a much more 'occult' way of doing things. At least there's a possibility with L'Institut of fighting back through the Board of Directors.

I think another thing that's caused a lot of problems is the overabundance of indirect financing. At one time, people were running between "l'aide à l'artisanat" at the National Film Board, L'Institut, The Canada Council and even private companies, and films ended up costing more and more money. And no one was responsible for the whole budget. There was something immoral about spending all that money without any kind of return.

Cinema Canada: And *Les fleurs sauvages* is a response to all that?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Yes. A film for friends by friends. A very simple experience, the way we live a lot of experiences. That's my intention. It's not for me to say whether or not we succeeded. ●

LES FLEURS SAUVAGES d. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre p. Marguerite Duparc ec. dial. J.P. Lefebvre p. man. M. Duparc asst. p. man. Yves Rivard, Edouard Faribault p. sec. Claudine Fauque a.d., cont. Josée Beaudet d.o.p. Guy Dufaux asst. cam. Philippe Martel, Serge Gregoire ad. Claude Havanavicius boom Denis Dupont head elect. Jacques Paquet asst. elect. Daniel Chrétien key grip Marc De Ernsted stills Gilles Corbeil ed. M. Duparc mixer Michel Charron music Raoul Duguay, Jean Corriveau from a melody by Claude Fonfrède titles/opticals Yves Rivard lab. Bellevue Pathé Ltee blow up from 16 to 35mm by Film Optical (Quebec) Ltd. Lp. Marthe Nadeau, Michèle Magny, Pierre Curzi, Eric Beauséjour, Claudia Aubin p.c. Cinak Ltée (1981), with the participation of IQC, CFDC, Radio-Québec and Geoffron et Leclerc Inc. running time 152 min.

● Lefebvre and crew (below)



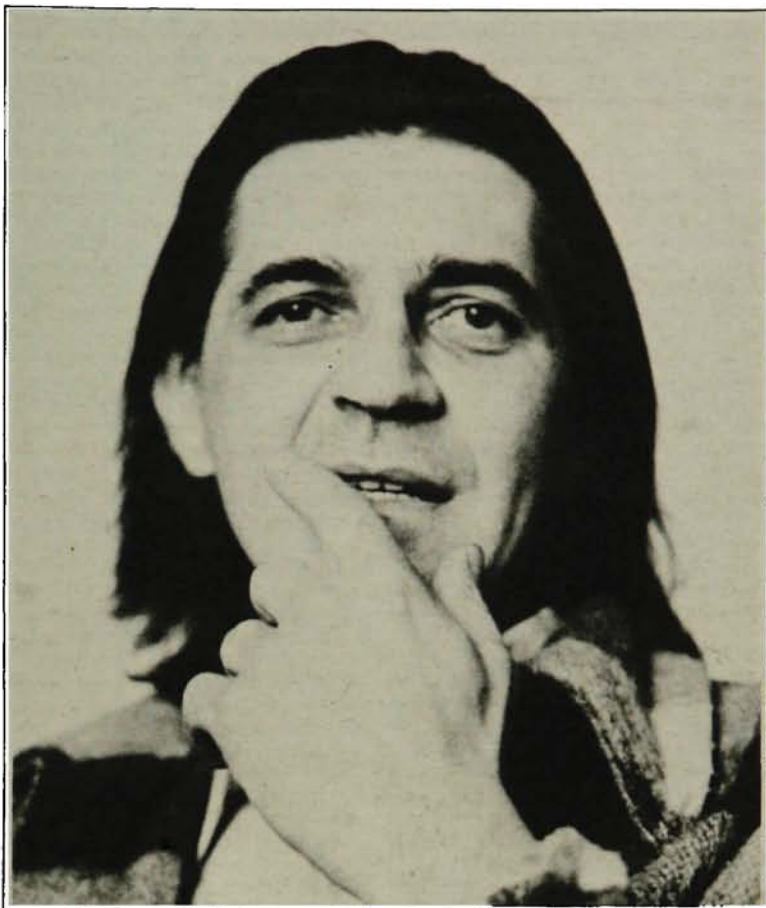
Of national cinema

by Susan Barrowclough

Susan Barrowclough: Why do you think a national cinema began to flourish in Quebec in the 1960s?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: It is very difficult to explain. The Quiet Revolution has become such an idealised thing. People here in Quebec do not know what really happened to them then. At that time Quebec didn't exist in the minds of people here or elsewhere. It was the realisation that other countries had the same colonial relationship with places like France, Britain and the United States that made us feel that we were not alone and that our situation was very similar to other peoples. For example, when I was living in Paris in 1962-3 the French were very hostile to the Québécois; we spoke differently, etc. and we were often mistaken for Algerians. That was the year in which Algeria gained its independence. In trying to understand what it was like to be French Algerian or Arab Algerian in relationship to France, I began to understand what it was to be Québécois. In school we had only been taught French literature, French philosophy, French values. We were not taught anything about Québécois culture. The Algerian War of Independence suddenly changed our apprehension of France and our relationship to it. In the same way we were gradually demystifying our relationship to the church and to the priest. The Roman Catholic Index had banned the books of Zola, Sartre, etc. and yet my generation had read a tremendous amount. At fifteen I had read Zola, at sixteen Sartre - it was the pleasure of the sin. You have to understand that in the 1960s we were making up for lost time. You couldn't, for example, have a civil marriage in Quebec until 1974 - imagine that! Until the change of the censorship laws in 1968 you couldn't go to the cinema until you were sixteen. There was only one certificate; every film had to be for everybody. At the beginning, in the late 1950s and 1960s, cinema was terribly important for naming our society, for making it exist in people's minds. It was almost like falling in love with your country and with the cinema at the same time - it was one and the same thing. Those first documentary films taught me where I was living and with whom I was living; they were a revelation. You suddenly felt you belonged to something. I wanted to make films, to go on enlarging that family portrait, to share it and to show people that there were extraordinary things going on here. The cinema became so important because we had never seen ourselves, we were hidden to ourselves. We had an inferiority complex towards our big cousins in the United States and our small cousins in France. But, above all, it was our language which was hidden, almost forbidden. You cannot imagine the joy I

Susan Barrowclough, past programmer at the Pacific Cinematheque, is currently adviser at the British Film Institute and has just written the British Film Institute Dossier No. 13 entitled "Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: the Quebec Connection."



felt when I saw Gilles Groulx's *Golden Gloves* - made in the part of Montreal where I had been brought up as a child. I saw my own streets, but most of all I heard people speak Québécois in a film for the first time. In the early 1960s we were just a small group of people in love with the cinema. For instance, *Objectif*, the film magazine that we published with our own money between 1960 and 1967, was very important in developing our thoughts on a possible cinema here. Interestingly, over half of the *Objectif* writers went on to become very active in the cinema in much the same way as the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics. At that time there were almost no good films shown in Quebec and so we had to go to New York about once a month to see films and then I went to Paris for a year just to see the movies. It was a wild dream then to actually have a Cinematheque here. Gradually we began to think of making films ourselves, to make something happen here. There was nothing here but the National Film Board. Maybe the circumstances were right, we were in a period of great changes without really knowing it at the time. We wanted to do something. When I began to make films I wanted to speak about passivity and the historical status quo. Over twenty years I have made a lot of films to fight against that historical passivity of our society, but also to show that passivity to people. I have always wanted to show people what, in a way, they do not want to know.

Susan Barrowclough: The documentary movement was very important to you and to Quebec's emergent cinema - why did you choose fiction?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: I think that Gilles Groulx is the father of Quebec cinema. *Le chat dans le sac* was the beginning of a real Québécois cinema. But Pierre Perrault's *Pour la suite du monde* was just as important. Together they are the two sides of our society, our culture. Without their tradition of Direct Cinema I wouldn't have made fiction

films. It taught me so much, but I wanted to go on and experiment. My own formation, my education, my feeling for something beyond the image, naturally led me to fiction. I was closer to theatre, to philosophy, history. In fiction you can re-invent situations, you can travel in time and play with the past, the present and the future. I always knew I would consciously follow the line, that there would be a continuity between the work of those filmmakers in Quebec who had been making Direct Cinema, *cinéma vérité* and my films. But I wanted to get away from the trap of realism. There is so much more to say than the little that can be shown on the screen. I do not believe in the false objectivity of documentary reportage as it is now used. Our experience of life and therefore of making a film in subjective: I can only talk about what I know. I think that people, wherever they live, have a lot in common, so that if I can speak with a certain sincerity of my experience of life in my society, I will at the same time be able to speak to other people in the world. Ironically, even though my films are very personal, very close to my experience of Quebec society, they are also very successful in Europe. *Les Dernières fiançailles* did well in Quebec (it played for eight weeks in Montreal) but it also did very well throughout France, and *Mon amie Pierrette* did very well in Portugal for example. People there recognised themselves in our situation.

Susan Barrowclough: When you began making films did you think of a project of work which would try to define and name your society?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Yes, that was an absolutely conscious choice right from the beginning with *Le révolutionnaire*. Québécois culture was always an outcast culture. We are much more American than we are French - but we are neither. We are perhaps much more like the Indian in North America. No

English Canadian film has ever spoken of the differences between Canadians and Americans, but many Québécois films are concerned with defining those differences. The naming process and the identification process is very important to me. *La chambre blanche* is my most obvious naming film. Like all my films, I am trying to say 'je me nomme Québécois, je vous nomme Québécois'. In saying that, I recognise that every individual is an individual, but is also a part of a collectivity. In a way I've always made home movies. If I need to speak of what is happening around me, it is simply because Quebec and the Québécois have been forced into silence for so many centuries. Yet, with my first films, people here said they were 'too Québécois, too specific' and that they would never cross the borders - but funnily enough they were the first Québécois fiction films to be recognised abroad. *Il ne faut pas mourir pour ça*, for instance, was our first fiction film to be commercially released in France and the critics there liked it because it was about a different society, in a different language.

Susan Barrowclough: The past is a recurring preoccupation in your films, but an ambivalent one. *L'Homomane* in your first film says, 'I have had enough of the past,' the woman in *Mon Oeil* says, 'what use is the past to me?', and *Abel's journey* in Rimbaud is almost like an exorcism of the past. But, in *Les maudits sauvages*, you seem to be suggesting that an understanding of the past is crucial. How do you explain this ambivalence?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Well, even *Les maudits sauvages* is about the ambivalence of the past because we don't exactly know what our past was. Right into the 1950s our history was taught here in terms of mythological figures; that's why I refer to so many myths like *Tékacouita* in this film. We have to relate to the past to be able to go to a certain kind of future. My earlier films, while dealing with the present, look at the way my generation in Quebec was historically formed, the conception we had of our own history - a very mythical and religious conception. But recently in films like *L'Amour blessé* and *Avoir seize ans* I have been much more concerned with the difficult present. The film I am making now, *Les fleurs sauvages*, is about three generations of people, so while it is about the present, again it is playing with the concept of time and with different perceptions of the present and the past.

Susan Barrowclough: When you made *Ultimatum* that too was about the difficult present, of autumn 1970 in Quebec. How would you describe your personal approach in this film to the political events it speaks of tangentially?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: *Ultimatum* is a series of impressions. It is the story of a man and a woman who live through the October Crisis. On one level it is just about two people during the summer. It is about the sun, growth, eroticism, yet it also poses the question of autumn. But, on another level, there is the spectre of October - while they love each other and enjoy the summer there is a forbidding atmosphere, a weight of violence around them. It is a film which tries to personalise a political experience, to interiorise a vision of an event which was completely new for Quebec, a country which had never known an army of occupation, etc. For me the only way to politicise people is to personalise political issues.

Susan Barrowclough: Was *Ultimatum* shown in Quebec and did people see it as a political film?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: No, it was hardly shown at all. It has had two screenings in Quebec: one at the Cinéma québécois when I had a retrospective there in 1973, and another at the University of Laval. It is not generally considered a political film and nobody has ever written about it. The first person to write about it was Peter Harcourt (P. Harcourt, *Jean Pierre Lefebvre*, Ottawa, CFI, 1981). For most intellectuals here, as elsewhere, if you do not spell out the politics with a big P, a film is not a political film if you do not obviously discuss politics in it. My political philosophy in a way is expressed at the end of *Ultimatum*: 'I'm not against my society, I'm not for my society, I am with my society.' Actually I borrowed that from a story Marcel Sabourin told me (Sabourin is the actor in many of Lefebvre's films). He was in Paris in 1968 and gave a lift in his car to an old woman who was carrying a big basket of food, on her way to the barricades. Marcel asked her, 'Are you for the students?' and she replied, 'Monsieur, I am not for the students, I am not against the students, I am with them.' When you criticise your society, you are criticising yourself. When I criticise myself in my films, I am criticising my society. It is difficult to be with your society; it is much easier to separate yourself off from it and criticise it from outside.

Susan Barrowclough: Your use of narrative, editing and photography changes from film to film. A film like *Jusqu'au coeur*, which is about television, advertising and the violence and irrationality of war, is edited as frenetically as a TV advert. A film like *Les dernières fiançailles*, on the other hand, concerned with the slow, traditional rural life of an old couple, is filmed in long takes, has minimal editing and unobtrusive camera work. Do you consciously try to find a form that is analogous to the content of your films?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: My deepest rule is that every subject has to have its own form. Language is never separate from the form, or the form from the subject. That is why I never talk of technique or art and why I dislike directors who always use the same form. If you want to say something different, something new, you have to use a different language. The old form carries with it the old ideas... I am very interested in the use of time and the use of real time as in *L'amour blessé*. That is probably my most theoretical film, my most rigorous film. I used real time to avoid dramatising the subject as it would be dramatised in a Hollywood-type movie. In *L'amour blessé* I wanted to mix the past and the present, but I hate flashbacks. So all the flashbacks are in the sound. The girl who is talking on the radio hotline is telling Louise's story of her past, and what is taking place with the couple behind the wall - which we can hear - is also Louise's past. A direct flashback is taking place in direct time, but behind the wall. I could have taken the camera and shown the couple making love behind the wall, I could have cut to the girl talking on the radio. But I think sound is much more effective. It is much closer to our consciousness and affects us much more deeply than visual images for many reasons. I am much more preoccupied by what is off the screen than by what is on it. What we can show on the screen is only a part of the whole. The screen is like a door being opened;

I am only trying to open that door for people watching the film. They must then go in and look for themselves and make their own conclusions. I think that is why so many people are unhappy with the endings of my films - I don't say what is going to happen or whether it is good or bad. That is very intentional. That is why the use of sound is so important to me. The sound in *L'amour blessé* is extremely realistic. But this realism is used to open the door to another level. In fact a commercial distributor in Montreal, who usually deals with pornographic films, saw the film when they were thinking about distributing it. But they found it too 'vulgar'. There was actually no sex in the film. It was all on the soundtrack. The viewer has to imagine and has to complete the meaning of the film by listening, so they have to be much more active than they would be in relation to a real pornographic film. The sound in the film is trying to sell you what the visual is not giving you.

Susan Barrowclough: Do you spend as long editing the sound as you do editing the image?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Oh yes, and sound men like working with me be-

cause I make it very clear before shooting a film that we will do a scene as many times as necessary for the sound, as much as for the camera. Before I write the script, I always write what I call the 'grammar' of the film - why we are doing it that way, why we are using direct sound or opposing sound. For example in *Rimbaud* the documentary aspect of the film is all in the soundtrack. Sound is much more abstract than the visual image; it has to be read on many levels by the audience - the listeners. In the Middle Ages people lived in a totally symbolic world. But, since the invention of photography, our society has believed almost scientifically in realism in the mistaken belief that we can reproduce mirror images. The greatest mistake of our Cartesian civilisation is that something exists only if it can be shown. If it cannot be shown it doesn't exist. I am much more interested in what cannot be shown, in what is off the screen and in what the viewer has to find for him/herself.

Susan Barrowclough: Is it because you are aware of the limitations of the visual image that you use both your images and your characters as signs which the viewer can interpret in a number of ways?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: I don't believe in the psychological representation of characters. For me an individual in my films is never just an individual, but a sign, a symbol, an image, an allegory of many people - our society exists through its signs and its images of itself. Abel, in *Il ne faut pas mourir pour ça*, and in *Rimbaud*, is a sign of the Québécois, but a sign which can be interpreted in many ways. If a film like *Mon amie Pierrette* had been made like a soap opera, the characters would only have represented themselves. But when you break the traditional structure they come to be more than they are in themselves. *Mon amie Pierrette* is not about the psychology of adolescence, but a dictionary of attitudes, of mores, of taboos in our society. I didn't want to make a journalistic film about an historical period and say, 'look, we are like this, a product of Catholicism, etc.', I merely wanted to retransmit the gestures, the everyday moments of life. It does not paint a period of history, but a period of life, a portrait of a generation between 1955 and 1967. The father is an image of the Québécois father, the mother is an image of the Québécois mother. So that more people can identify with them and find themselves in these images of their society - even if they don't like them. In *Patricia et Jean-Baptiste*, I take the part of Jean-Baptiste, but while I identified very closely with that character, it is not just me. It is a type of person out of a particular society. I was not showing my psychological problems, I was offering instead this image of a Québécois to others to see themselves, to understand themselves. In a way to show a familiar thing in an unfamiliar way. Yet, I do not think you have to be Québécois to interpret the Québécois sign. I am a great admirer of Mizoguchi. You don't have to be Japanese to interpret his characters. What is important is the rhythm, the notion of time - it is always very slow.

Susan Barrowclough: Could we talk about the crisis which Quebec cinema now seems to be in. Why do you think that now there is both federal and provincial financial help, the future of Quebec's cinema is so much more threatened than it was in the 1960s when there was no help at all?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Unfortunately there has been a great change in the attitude of people making films here now. Fifteen years ago there was nothing here: there were no funding institutions, no provincial cinema organisations. But we wanted to make films and somehow together, with a lot of enthusiasm, we managed to make them. Now, filmmaking has become big business in the hands of the producers, with bigger and bigger budgets and crews and the close working relationship with people has disappeared. It is also perhaps a question of people getting older and being concerned with their own careers. At Cinak we are still resisting and trying to go on making films in a personal and controllable way. One of the problems for both English and French Canadian filmmaking is that people do not want to make a different cinema. They want to compete in the international market above all so they make films that are not different, but the same as American commercial film. But the problem today is also an economic one. In 1970 the average cost in Quebec of a 35mm colour feature film was \$150,000. In 1975 it was around \$340,000. Today, budgets are in millions of dollars. These sort of budgets are completely out of proportion with the economy of a small country like Quebec and with its box-office potential. It is impossible to make a profit on such large budgets or even to earn back the investment capital. That is why people have to make international co-productions, to get the production capital and to be assured of at least a second market. These budgets are totally unrealistic and bear no relation to the economic realities of Quebec.

Susan Barrowclough: However, there was an overwhelming feeling at *La Semaine du Cinéma Québécois* in October 1980 (the eighth annual conference to be held in Montreal on independent Québécois film and the first to invite filmmakers from other countries to discuss mutual problems of production, exhibition, distribution) that Quebec's cinema was going in two directions. On the one hand, young filmmakers had merely adopted and reproduced a certain type of Québécois cinema 'to show Quebec to the Québécois' that had fulfilled a function in a particular period; on the other, there was a tendency to multi-dollar productions aimed at an international market.

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Yes, we have been discussing this problem a lot recently. You could say it is rather similar to the way in which Italian Neo-Realism died. At a particular time in Italy filmmakers felt a need to say essential things, to make emotional and political statements in an immediate way in relation to what their society was experiencing at that time and had just experienced. People like Rossellini and De Sica were very important to me and to many filmmakers here in the 1950s and 1960s - the connection between Neo-Realism and Québécois cinema is very close. The filmmaking of Michel Brault and Pierre Perrault, for instance, was very close to that of De Sica. But, there again, De Sica's films of the 1940s and 1950s are very different to his films of the 1960s. *Bicycle Thieves* came out of a precise moment. The present crisis in our cinema is perhaps not just due to a change in political climate, but in people; the mentality of those working in film has changed also. It is very sad for instance that after *Objectif* stopped publishing there has been no regrouping of people working in film. There is very

Marguerite Duparc

For twenty years, Marguerite Duparc and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre worked together. Editor, producer and companion, Duparc shared the responsibilities of their production company Cinak, inspiring many young filmmakers to get on with the business of using film for personal expression. Her death in March was sorely felt. Carole Langlois, responsible for French production at the Canadian Film Development Corp., remembers.

In February 1981, Marguerite and I met to discuss Cinak's film projects. As usual, she was handling the difficult financing aspects of Cinak's activities. But this time, she had something new and exciting to talk about. After a film production silence of about two years, Cinak had two projects scheduled for production in the coming summer. *Les fleurs sauvages*, a film by Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, and Marguerite's first feature film as a director, entitled *Histoires pour Blaise*.

I was curious about her own film project and, in her modest way, she explained it all to me. Her son, Blaise Lefebvre, would play the lead. The story would be told in live action and animation and would focus on Blaise's own experience growing up. Money being scarce, I pointed out to her that Cinak would have to establish its priorities since the CFDC would probably find it difficult to get financially involved in two projects handled by the same production company. Half a second later, Marguerite replied, 'Of course, you must give priority to *Les fleurs sauvages*. I'll manage.' All her friends, and there are many, will recognize her here. Thanks to her dedication, *Les fleurs sauvages* was financed, produced, completed and is now on its way to Cannes. Her own film, *Histoires pour Blaise*, was only partially shot when she died.

Carole Langlois ●

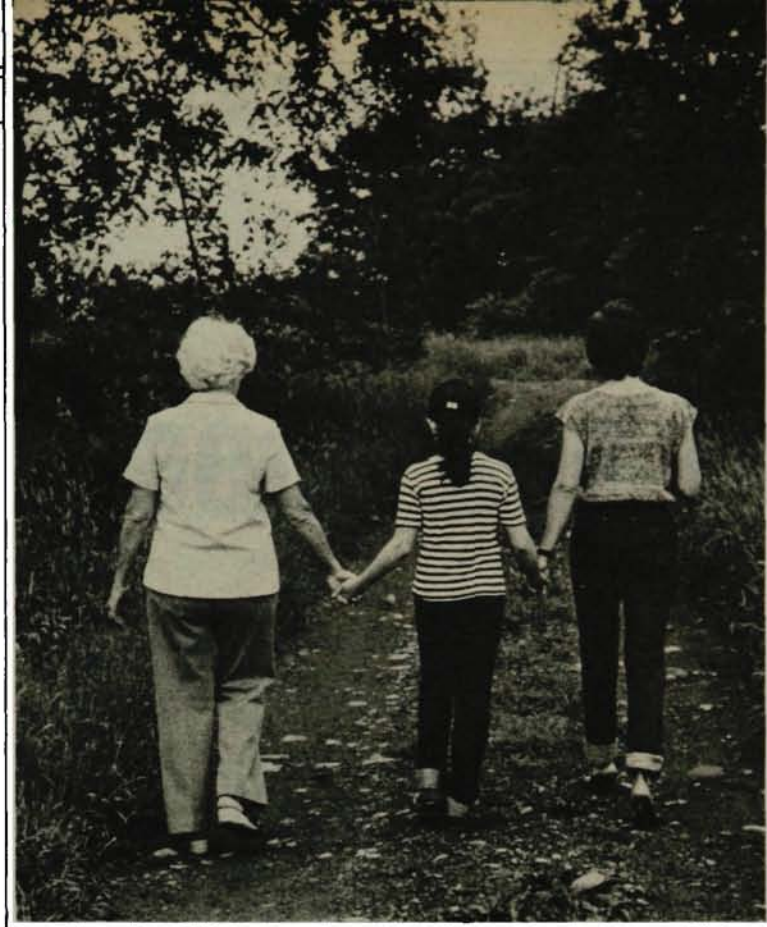
little analysis of what our cinema was trying to do in the 1960s and how it should or should not differ now. There is very little reflection on the practices and the effects of the policies of the CFDC (Canadian Film Development Corporation) and the Quebec Film Institute, or even on the eternal life of the NFB. Unfortunately today the public and even film students do not know the films of Jutra, Groulx, Carle, Perrault, but of course they know all the American and French directors. I have no desire to be nostalgic about the past, but we have to be conscious of the history of our cinema, to have a clear idea of what its future could be.

Susan Barrowclough: How have the federal funding policies of the CFDC and tax-shelter investment affected the type of film now being made in Quebec?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: We are now in a situation in which tax-shelter investment has taken all the power out of the hands of the filmmakers and put it into the hands of the producers. The investors don't care what sort of films are made; they have made a profit even if the production deal is never made into a film. However, you have to remember that far fewer films are made with tax-shelter money in Quebec than in English Canada, as Québécois culture is considered marginal and has much smaller potential markets than so-called Canadian films in English which are very often just bad copies of American movies. At the same time tax-shelter films are made in Quebec - in English and usually with Montreal as a stand-in for, say, Paris or Atlantic City. Denis Héroux, Quebec's biggest commercial producer who does arrange tax-shelter productions, makes films that have very little to do with Quebec and are on the whole aimed at the French market. The cultural references of the CFDC bureaucrats and of tax-shelter producers are those of Hollywood and Los Angeles.

Susan Barrowclough: Given the sort of international packaged films that the CFDC has helped produce in recent years, how did you manage to get financial assistance from them for five films?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: When the CFDC started in 1968, we had already made five features and had a certain kind of credibility. In their first year the CFDC made a cultural gesture by awarding 'Primes à la qualité', prizes or bonuses amounting to \$100,000 for what they called 'quality films,' rather like the system in Sweden (without which, by the way, Bergman would never have been able to go on making films). We received \$14,000 for *Il ne faut pas mourir pour ça* and \$13,000 for *Patricia et Jean-Baptiste* - that put us into business. That money enabled us to pay the crews' salaries and then left us some capital with which we could go and ask CFDC for additional financing for our next film, *La chambre blanche*, which we received. That was the first film of ours they invested in. This sort of direct incentive was terribly important, but the CFDC only did it for one year. In 1975 we didn't even bother to show the script of *L'amour blessé* to the CFDC as we were sure they would turn it down: there is very little action and at script stage it just looked like a dialogue list. So we took the risk of shooting it and then showed it to them and received some money for post-production. I co-wrote the script of *Rimbaud* with Mireille Amiel, a friend from France, and when we showed it to the CFDC they agreed to put up some money if we could find a



co-producer in France. We found L'Institut national de l'audiovisuel.

Susan Barrowclough: You have received financing from the Quebec Film Institute, haven't you?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Yes, I got money for *Avoir seize ans* and I have just received confirmation that they will fund my new film, *Les fleurs sauvages*. We are shooting it on a total budget of \$303,000 (the Institute gives a maximum of 60%). It is a film about three generations - the mother, the daughter and the young children. It is a film about communication or non-communication between generations - it is about tolerance. It will be made on 16mm, which means a budget that we can afford and so that it can be shown in many different sorts of places.

Susan Barrowclough: In what sorts of cinemas have your films been shown?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: A lot of them have opened in small cinemas in Montreal (*salles parallèles*), but they have also been shown in schools, universities and in small, communal places in the country. I have spent a lot of time travelling with my films and discussing them with people - that is what I like doing most. For instance with my last film, *Avoir seize ans*, we couldn't find anyone here to release it commercially, so we hired a cinema in Montreal and it played for sixteen nights and it did very well. Each screening was accompanied by an *animateur* and there were wonderful discussions afterwards between parents and children. Since then we have had a lot of bookings on the film, mostly in venues that involve discussion. There was a time when many Québécois films were shown in cinemas and on television and a good audience was growing, slowly but wonderfully. Many people used to tell me that Brault's *Les ordres* and our *Les dernières fiançailles* were very important in re-building the audience here for Québécois films after they had deserted them in the early 1970s when there was such a flood of sex films. *Mon amie Pierrette* was shown quite often on Radio Canada and *Maudits sauvages* was shown twice. When *Les dernières fiançailles* was first shown - I think it was in 1975 or 76

- it had very high audience ratings. One and a half million, out of a population of six million - that's pretty good. But now it has changed. There hasn't been a film of Pierre Perrault's on for eight years, even though he has four new films sitting at the Film Board and his films used to be shown at prime time on Saturday or Sunday night. They did show *Rimbaud* on Radio Quebec twice in 1979 - they paid \$25,000 for it. They offered us \$12,000 for *Avoir seize ans*, including the actors' rights. After paying \$7,000 to the actors, we would have got \$5,000 for a two-hour colour film - ridiculous, isn't it? What we need here is for television to get into production or co-production with the private industry instead of the routine of just buying Film Board films.

Susan Barrowclough: It is somewhat surprising that the provincial film organizations that do exist - the Institute, the Cinéma-thèque - were actually founded by the provincial Liberal Party and that since the Parti Québécois has been in power they have done so little to improve the situation in the arts in Quebec. They have not increased the Institute's meagre budget, or made any gesture towards legislation on quotas, amusement tax, etc. Is there a feeling of disappointment with the Parti Québécois among those working in the arts?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Totally; they have proved a great disappointment to most people in the artistic community.

They did start with a very developed position on cultural policy, but have not fulfilled either their practical or their ideological promises. Like the federal government, the provincial government does not understand what is at stake ideologically in allowing our cinemas and our television channels to be flooded with American films and programs. They do not seem to understand the ideology of cultural production. I am transmitting of a way of life, a way of thinking. They also do not understand the economic side of it. People in Canada now say that there is a film industry here but that is just not true. An industry can be said to exist when all the sectors are integrated - production, exhibition, distribution - but nothing has been done to protect our market; there is no quota, there is no law about reinvestment of profits made, for example, by Famous Players cinema circuit in Canada. Of course, Famous Players has been investing in production on a modest scale since the beginning of the CFDC in 1968, but that is a sort of gentlemen's agreement to pre-empt legislation on box-office profits. I have often said that I think the cinema in Quebec is the perfect analogue of Quebec itself and of its future; to have a healthy national cinema here we need to work on both the cultural and the economic level. To do that, what is needed is the political decisions and direct political measures and legislation.

Susan Barrowclough: Finally, how do you manage to continue to produce and make your films? When I talk to other filmmakers in Quebec they tell me that it is absolutely impossible to make films on budgets as small as yours.

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: We have gone on making films in the same way as everybody was making them here ten years ago. In 1964 there was no sort of institution which could give us money, so we took our pocket money and began to produce our own films and also some friends' films. We have always had production ceilings at Cinak because we knew we didn't want to become big. I certainly don't want to go back to the past, to no money at all, and I don't think the key to the future of Quebec's cinema is to be found in either large or small budgets. But I do think it's essential to recover a way of thinking about film, of working together and of controlling our films which we had at the beginning of our cinema - a guerilla-type filmmaking. Ten years ago people were making films here that were financially and culturally relevant to Quebec itself. We, Marguerite and I, simply try to go on producing films with reasonable budgets. One of the secrets, of course, is to shoot fast. To shoot fast, you have to be very organised and carefully pre-plan a film, but the producer has to be part of the crew, not an enemy. I like working very closely with a small group of people who I know very well and who contribute to the film. Now, of course, everybody gets paid. On our new film that we are just going to start shooting, *Les fleurs sauvages*, Marguerite and I are taking the risk of investing our salaries of director, script-writer, producer and editor. But that's normal: we've always taken those risks and that is how we have been able to go on making and producing films for twenty years. ●

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Filmography

- Le révolutionnaire* - 1965
- Patricia et Jean-Baptiste* - 1966
- Mon oeil* - 1966
- Il ne faut pas mourir pour ça* - 1967
- Mon amie Pierrette* - 1967
- Jusqu'au coeur* - 1968
- La chambre blanche* - 1969
- Q-Bec My Love* - 1970
- Les maudits sauvages* - 1971
- L'ultimatum* - 1971
- On n'engraisse pas les cochons à l'eau claire* - 1973
- Les dernières fiançailles* - 1973
- Le gars des vues* - 1975
- L'amour blessé* - 1975
- Le vieux pays où Rimbaud est mort* - 1977
- Avoir 16 ans* - 1978
- Les fleurs sauvages* - 1981

Bread and shoe polish

by Lois Siegel

If you're from Winnipeg and you haven't made a film before, it can be quite exciting to come to Montreal and make one under the auspices of the National Film Board of Canada where filmmakers you've heard about for years are working at your side.

And it's not everyday that two unknown guys like John Paskievich and Mike Mirus from the Prairies get their film chosen for the Short Film Competition of the Cannes International Film Festival. But if you are from Winnipeg you also know that this sequence of events couldn't have been as easy as it sounds. There must have been some Murphy's Law (whatever can go wrong, will) incidents incorporated in the process to make it real to life. "The success balances out with other things," explains Paskievich, director, writer and photographer.

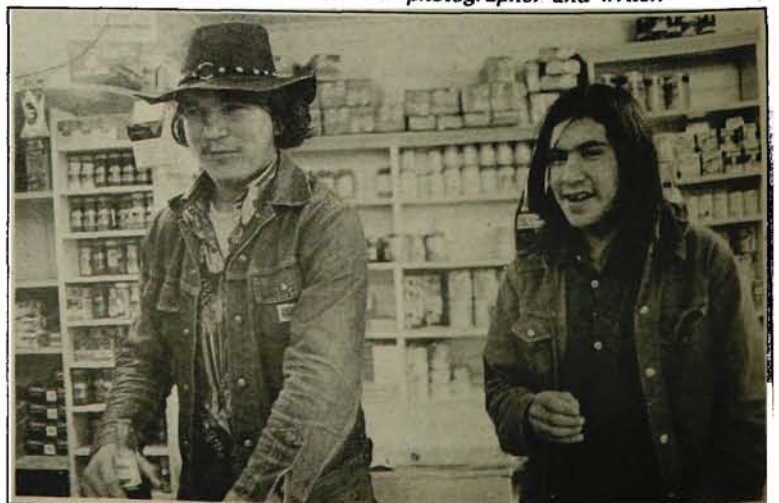
And so it was with his film *Ted Baryluk's Grocery*, a sensitive, 10-minute, black-and-white production, composed entirely of stills, about his step-father's small grocery store in the North End of Winnipeg.

In 1977 Paskievich had an idea for a film, about 2000 photographs taken in and around the store, and some wild sound of conversations recorded in the grocery. He wanted to put together a mood piece. Mike Scott, an NFB producer in Winnipeg, was excited about the possibility of a film. Paskievich was sent to the NFB in Montreal where he appeared one day with three boxes of photos under his arm and walked into Tom Daly's office, apparently unannounced. "Could I interest you in these pictures?" he said earnestly.

Daly, luckily, liked the images, and he and John spent the rest of the afternoon. *Lois Siegel is a teacher, filmmaker, photographer and writer.*



photos: John Paskievich



TED BARYLUK'S GROCERY d. sc./ed. John Paskievich, Mike Mirus d.o.p. John Paskievich sd. rec. Mike Mirus, Leon Johnson sd. ed. Mike Mirus re-rec. Jean-Pierre Joutel animation cam. Cameron Gaul, Ray Dumas studio admin. Charles Lough prod. Wolf Koenig, Michael Scott exec. p. Michael Scott running time 10 min. 19 sec. p.c. National Film Board.



MAKING IT

looking at them.

But that was only step one. It took four meetings with the program committee of the Board over a period of four years to get the film approved.

Paskievich, a photographer by profession, and Mike Mirus, a high school teacher who recorded the sound, kept trekking across country to Montreal with video examples of their ideas. Despite the fact that Daly, Scott, Colin Low, Robert Duncan, John Spotton and Wolf Koenig were all behind the film, the NFB committee, which kept changing each year, was afraid to take the risk of supporting a strange project from an even stranger land.

Finally the Winnipeg Art Gallery applied to the Secretary of State for storyboard money. And eventually, in May,

years. "It's a small store, not big like Safeway - but big enough."

Helen, his daughter, is presented. She helps in the store. Baryluk explains that his heart isn't good, and the doctors have told him to retire. The problem is that Helen doesn't want to take over the store. She is of another generation and wants to move to a bigger city and perhaps continue her schooling.

Baryluk knows he can't force Helen to manage the store, any more than he can force the doctor to say he is young and healthy. "I had my chance, now it's Helen's turn."

His only real concern is that Helen doesn't forget where she comes from - and that she doesn't forget to come home once in awhile. "In Europe people stick together - here the family is not so

important," Baryluk says. He jokes that perhaps they should freeze kids so they don't grow old, and we see a shot of two kids reaching into a cold storage refrigerator for popsicles.

The film says - don't forget your roots, no matter who you are; but it also tells us about people and changes. As the images pass by we see all kinds of people: Polish, Slovak, Filipino, Indian - "all mixed together like soup." And one strong remark reflects an ironic sense of "Canadian Content" - that even the Indians are like immigrants in their own country.

The customers don't file through the store like they would in a sterile, automated, commercial shopping mall, instead they take it easy and relax. One lady opens a carton of milk to sniff it to see if it's fresh. Ted Baryluk asks her if she would do that in a Safeway Store. She replies, "No, that's why I come here."

We see punk kids, one wearing reflective sunglasses, a child showing off dracula teeth, and we meet a singer who gives a little concert for the customers. She was famous in Europe and now works as a cook in Nellie's Restaurant across the street. Baryluk explains, "It's not easy singing an old song in a new place."

As with the photographs of Cartier-

Bresson, we become involved in the lives of the people captured during a particular 'moment' in their lives. Baryluk remarks, "In Winnipeg there's lots to see on the streets - it's better than going to a movie." But he is afraid that the younger generation is moving too fast to take notice. His concern is transferred to the viewer who is taken by his sincerity and the charm of the people in his store.

Typical of "nouveau riche" filmmakers, Paskievich and Mirus said that if they aren't sent to Cannes for the festival, they wouldn't mind being sent to Montreal again. There they can at least enjoy the highlight of their previous stay, the NFB's 99c breakfast special - and probably the spot where they hashed over most of their film ideas - four years gave them plenty of time.

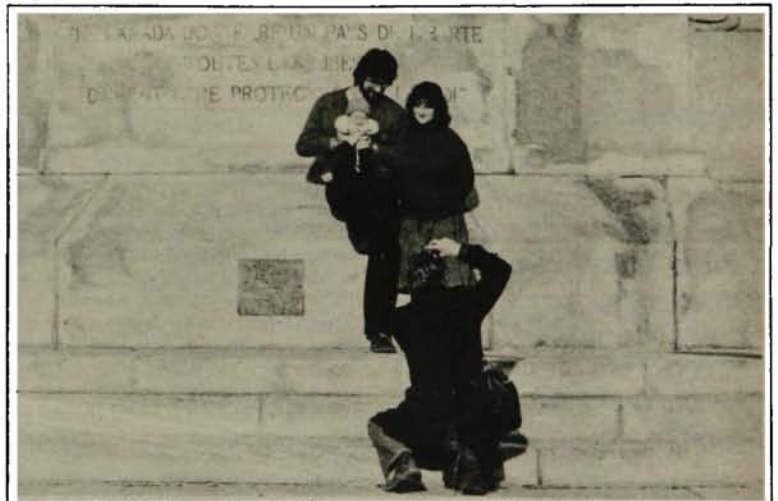
And typical of today's uptight society, when the NFB's P.A. system came on the other day during lunch in the cafeteria, the announcement said, "Attention please. We have just learned..." - and everyone waited in trepidation for the warning of an air raid attack, something urgent about El Salvador, or the explosion of an atomic bomb. But it was 'only' the congratulating announcement to two boys from Winnipeg - their film had just been selected for Cannes... ●



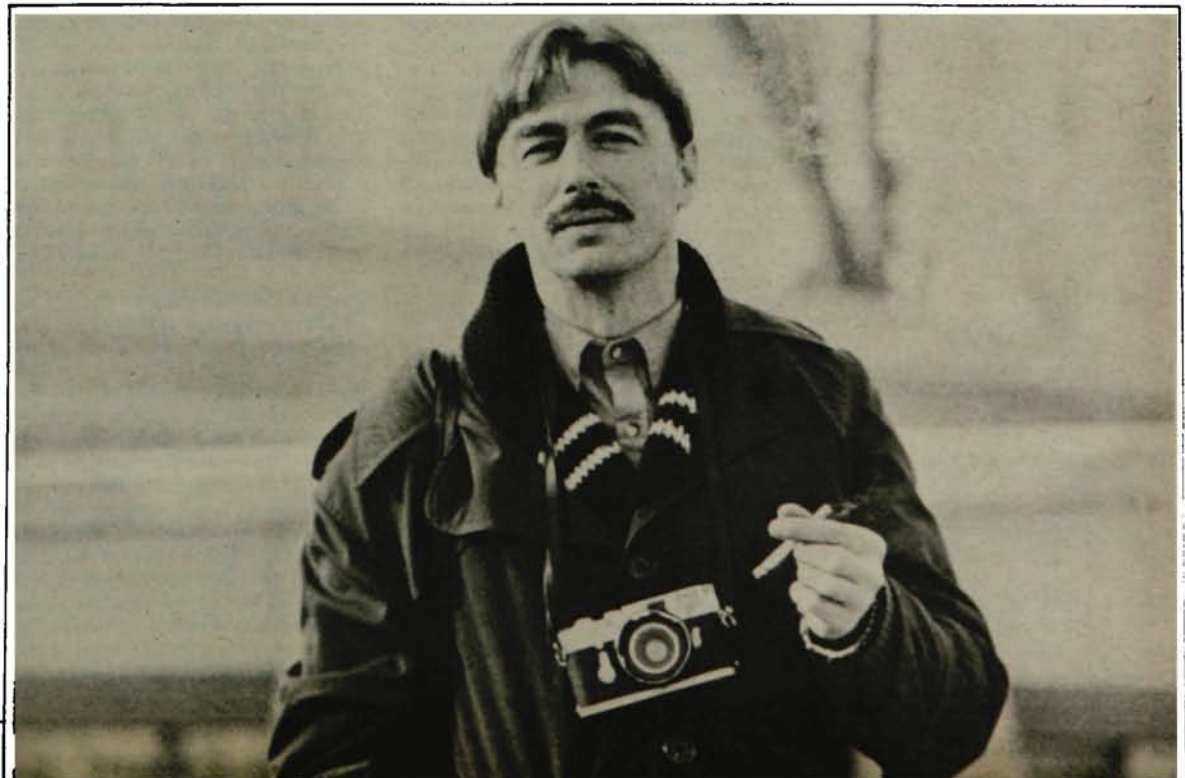
1981, the project was approved by the NFB, by one vote.

Paskievich had a vision and was persistent with it. Although the delay in shooting gave him more time to sharpen and develop his ideas, the one big loss was that Ted Baryluk died before the film was completed, and instead of Baryluk's voice telling us his story, it is Paskievich's.

When the film was finished, NFB distributors saw no theatrical potential in the film. They said it could only be of interest to primary schools in a series called "Knowing Your Neighborhood." Such is life...



● Ted Baryluk (left) who inspired John Paskievich (below) to photograph a grocery, and Mike Mirus (above, with family), who edited the photos and made a movie



Ted Baryluk's grocery is a place where immigrants and the poor come to buy food and to chat. But the film is much more than a mere document of a neighborhood store. It's unusual because it is composed entirely of still photographs which tell a story in sequence. And it is even more unusual because the sound, edited by Mike Mirus, seems to synchronize with everything happening on the screen. The sound is subtle and does not clutter or conflict with the image. And the images not only relate the events of one day in the life of this store and its inhabitants, but they are strong pictures in themselves, and each one could stand alone to tell its own personal tale.

Personal is the true description of this film. It has its own special sense of drama. We enter the life of Ted Baryluk and through voice-over are introduced to his perceptive philosophies.

As we see him open his store at 8 a.m. one morning, we are given a glimpse of his life, the concerns and conflicts he is feeling. In broken Ukrainian/English he tells us that he has run the store for 20

INSIDE THE CRTC DECISION

Marc Gervais on the pay-TV controversy

interview by Jean-Pierre and Connie Tadros

"The CRTC really thrashed out the question of a universal system... Given the functioning of our type of economic, political system, there were lots of arguments pro and con."

Marc Gervais, longtime film professor at Loyola University in Montreal, and sometime film critic and commentator for Cinema Canada, serves on the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission on a part time basis. At present, Gervais is the commissioner who knows the most about the film industry, and is serving on the pay-TV panel. The interview below gives some insights into the working of the CRTC, and the reasons behind its controversial decision on pay-TV.

Readers should be reminded that the CRTC awarded two national licenses (First Choice and Lively Arts Market Builders), and four regional licenses (Star Channel in Nova Scotia, Ontario Independent, Alberta Independent and a multi-lingual channel in B.C., World View). The CRTC has 9 permanent commissioners, and 8 part-time positions. To study local issues, the commissioners are divided into panels which report back to the full commission. The CRTC operates at arm's length from the department of Communications, reporting directly to the cabinet. At present, two appeals of the pay-TV decision are before the cabinet.

Cinema Canada: *What kind of an experience was it, making the pay-TV decision at the CRTC? I don't mean to ask about the content of the decision, but about the process.*

Marc Gervais: It's an incredible process and, when you're part of it, in the beginning it's an education on how democracy works.

Applicants send in monumental amounts of documentation, and the CRTC has staff who take care of that. The commissioners are divided into panels, say three or four people for a local panel (there were seven on the pay-TV panel because it was so important). The staff briefs the panel about

any particular problems and provides a summary book. Of course, you can always go back and read the original documentation. Then there's the hearing.

The panel's job is to question people. We have a lawyer also, helping us. You hear the various parties out, and you cross-question them. All of that, of course, is recorded.

After the hearing is over, the panel meets with staff and comes to a kind of global feeling about the matter, findings to the panel. And the panel has another meeting and, often, the panel—very carefully. Again, staff submits its finding to the panel. And the panel has another meeting and, often, the panel—because it has other preoccupations and other priorities—will not go along with staff at all. Then, the panel presents its recommendation to the whole commission, the 17 of us. The three or four present it to the whole group. Those who weren't on the panel have to be briefed anew, if it's very complex, but if it isn't, it's presented there and the whole group comes hopefully to some kind of consensus, which generally backs the panel, but not necessarily...

Cinema Canada: *Does the staff have a right to speak up, at that point, if the panel has in fact reversed a staff position?*

Marc Gervais: Oh no. The panel has absolute power. But hopefully, there's a conversation going on all the time and if the panel disagrees very much with the staff, that's highlighted so that the other members know and can ask staff.

If it's an ad hoc decision, the opinion of the whole commission is noted and then the final decision comes from the executives. The executives are the full-time members who live in Ottawa, and work nine days a week. Now, if it's a question of legislation, or substance,



● Marc Gervais

INSIDE THE CRTC DECISION

that has to be made by the whole commission, including the part-time members. What generally happens is that what the panel wants is what the whole commission wants. And what the whole commission wants, the executives carry out. That's almost always what happens. Almost always...

Cinema Canada: And for pay-TV?

Marc Gervais: That was a tricky one because certain of those things were sort of commission things and certain were executive. There were decisions as to which group or groups got the licence; it was the executives who decided. The executives accepted the panel's recommendation as to the choice. Two members of that executive "se sont désolidarisés," you know, they wrote a dissenting opinion.

Cinema Canada: But were the dissenting members of the executive on the pay-TV panel?

Marc Gervais: No. You see that's what happens sometimes. The executives don't have nearly the amount of information. They haven't been through the process or anything. That could be the weakness of the system, where the executive over-rides the panel. It very rarely happens, and it didn't even happen in this instance where it was only two of the executives, you see, so they were still out-voted.

So, it's a very lengthy process. And what makes it peculiarly complex, is that this is just the beginning for pay-TV, and the press hasn't caught on to that at all. They don't even seem interested in that. These decisions are not at all the final word about the pay-TV situation...

Cinema Canada: Are you talking about the universal option?

Marc Gervais: Yes, and that is going to change the whole thing in terms of certain, specified, special interests concerning Canadian film and the film and television production scene.

Just how democracy functions

Cinema Canada: In the decision, there's an inherent contradiction because it says the licensees can meet the requirements set up by the CRTC, and then it goes on and says that a universal system would really meet the objectives better.

Marc Gervais: Yes, and that is what I meant when I said I learned how democracy functions. Before I arrived, there was a lengthy process and it culminated in the famous "Therrien Report" (Réal Therrien was a member of the panel.) The Therrien Report had studied the "extension of services," and they went all across Canada on that, seeing whether the CRTC should extend services up to the Northern people. It was a sociological problem. What do you present to them? Are you going to destroy their culture? How much in English, how much in French? Should the programming be Canadian, American, whatever...

The whole question that was to over-

ride the debate on pay-TV starts here with the question of discretionary services, versus universal services. I won't go into the Therrien Report, because that gets into a whole other question, but the CRTC really thrashed out the question of a universal system (a system that is on every cable and which you have to pay for whether you like it or not) versus a purely discretionary system which you take if you like, and you pay for it.

Given the functioning of our type of economic, political system, there were lots of arguments pro and con. It was decided that when the call came for pay-TV, the expression of a clear preference for the discretionary would be made, but the call would not totally exclude the universal. Now, that was the fruit of a process, an agonizing one in which the CRTC didn't have all the answers, and never claimed to. It was learning as it went along.

Representations were made by all kinds of groups including nationalists and big business groups. Well, big business is all for discretionary, and the nationalists and the Canadian content producers want universal so that everybody has to pay for a system that is going to impose a Canadian system, and generate money for Canadian production. I am oversimplifying grossly, but that tended to be the alignment: the National Film Board, the Canadian Film Development Corp., would all be on the side of universal in the early days, and the exhibitors, distributors and all would be on the side of the discretionary.

Well, given the system in Canada... When was the last time that Canada succeeded in getting the audio-visual, the movies or anything a self-taxing system to pour money back into the industry? We've never succeeded in doing it. Why? It just seems that when you get into that domain, the government doesn't want it, nobody wants it. It's just "self-serving groups," trying to push Canadian products and Canadian culture.

Cinema Canada: But why doesn't the government want such a system?

Marc Gervais: You go and ask the cabinet, go ask the M.P.s. go and ask the Canadian people. Ask anybody in the street... "Oh no, we're going to get another tax?" It's perfectly all right for a cable owner to keep pushing up his rates, or for gas prices to keep going up. That's okay. But put a tax that would go back into the Canadian film industry and the answer is, "No, no," for some reason. In the cultural field, it's always like that. So, whatever the complex reasoning was, it was felt inopportune to put all the eggs in the basket of the universal. It's not a simple question, and I've caricatured it because I'm a product of the culture side.

So, when the call was made for pay-TV, the preference for discretionary was very clearly stated to such an extent that the CBC and other interested parties said, 'Since you obviously are going for the discretionary model, we're not presenting a universal model.' And yet, it left the door open.

About 45 groups presented themselves at the hearings, not making petitions but just saying, "This is the way it should go, 'please, use these principles when you're awarding the license'; it was very open. And many, many of those said, 'We still need the universal.' But the commission had already clearly favored the discretionary, so what position does that put you in?"

It is calculated that millions were spent in making these applications, preparing discretionary systems under the impression that the licenses would go to discretionary. And then you're going to come across with a decision for a universal system? After all of that, it would really not be fair, and so on. And yet, what do you do? You haven't closed universal off totally in the call, and in the course of the hearings, as new kinds of findings were fit into the machine, into the CRTC which doesn't know everything and which still had a lot to learn about the film industry, it became more and more obvious...

What were the principles? What was to be achieved by pay-TV? Do we leave it wide open? Pay-TV comes, and people are going to buy what they want, and that means the American blockbusters, six months after they're shown in the theatres. Is that what we're going to do? Let the market determine the whole thing? That's one way to go: laissez-faire economics.

Another way is to ban American blockbusters to make a totally Canadian system. Just try and do that! Nothing else will cause a revolution in Canada but

"Another way is to ban American blockbusters to make a totally Canadian system. Just try and do that! Nothing else will cause a revolution in Canada, but that will."

that will. Just as if you try and stop the American channels from coming up here. So is that going to be the way? Set up the walls? The Department of Communications, and the Minister Francis Fox, make it clear that the wall system cannot work. If we don't allow American stuff up here through Canadian channels, people are going to take it straight from the States - and just try and stop them...

Laissez-faire is out, the walls concept is out, so what are we going to do?

We are going to give the people a chance to get what they want through programming and advertising, but to use that thing to create funds for Canadian production. Fox has stated that's the DOC's general game plan in this whole, incredible, expanding communications thing now, of which pay-TV is only one aspect. So, the CRTC, which is an independent body, but which nonetheless can be over-ruled by the Cabinet, said in its call: we're going to try and achieve three things. We obviously have "un certain soucis" for quality, but that's not really what we're there to legislate. We're going to give the people what they want, a new kind of outlet like what Home Box Office is giving in the States; but we're going to try and find the means to create a solid base for the production of Canadian products, Canadian content, Canadian movies, movies for

TV, TV serials, programs for TV, dramatic programs for TV. Canada is very good in public affairs and documentaries, in news, in sports, quiz shows... things like that. But it's very weak in dramatic production. That we take wholly from Hollywood. That's what we're going to use pay-TV for. We're going to set it up in such a way that people who get the licenses are going to pour the money into Canadian production: buy things off the shelf, yes, but much more than that. It's money which will go right into production. The licensees actually become co-producers or interim financiers or whatever... How do you achieve that?

The various discretionary models come along and the different players suggested different things and they were quite close to each other. First Choice was quite "generous" about what it poured back into Canadian things. The CRTC now has imposed a rule which is very smart: of the money that the licensee is spending in programming, 60% must go into Canadian programs or (whichever is the greater amount) 35% of total revenue. So, this is the way that money is going to go back to production. Then, such a percent of time, including peak time, must be given to the showing of Canadian programs. So we get them both, but we get them on the financing which is the real important one, because we know the games that can be played with time. People are going to get *Superman III* not terribly long after it goes into the movie theatres, but the licensee can't spend all his money getting *Superman III*. They've got to work it out so that 35% of their gross revenue goes to Canadian programs or that 60% of the programming is Canadian.

Now, that was fine but as we got the figures in from different people, it became quite obvious that if you had a discretionary system, nobody knew how many people were going to use it. There are optimistic scenarios and pessimistic scenarios. Taking those figures, and using an optimistic scenario, it would mean that you might get something like \$300 million over a five-year period poured into Canadian production. Very good! Now, there was a huge question of whether pay-TV should be national or be regional as well. We won't go into all of that but again, we live in this country, Canada. So, let's say, a political reality made the CRTC go into the area of regional systems.

Now, if we went the universal route, there's no guessing. You know the number of people who have cable in Canada, and we get \$600 million in a five-year period.

People who buy the present licensed services will pay between \$12 and \$15 a month for each channel. So if you are in an area where you have three channels, you'll be spending around \$45, which doesn't hurt you if you're a Bronfman, but if you aren't living at that degree of great affluence, \$45 a month is a lot. But as it's conceived now the universal could be something like \$2.50, that's all; not \$12 to \$15 but \$2.50. It would be run by some kind of public group, not a profit organization; everything that goes in pays the salaries and the offices, whatever. Everything else goes into Canadian production. See the difference?

Not only that but, this group, whatever name it has, would be in a position, of course, to invest and it'll be doing some equity financing. It'll have shares in some of the things it's funding and, if

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there's any talent in Canada, surely some of these productions are going to make money. They are not only going to be shown on this universal channel, in English or French, but they are also going to be sold to American pay-TV. Some of them will be shown in the cinemas and so on. And you reach a point in economics where more and more of these things are out on the market. They are being bought by Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Hong Kong, maybe England, maybe Germany, maybe Japan, maybe in the States, and over the years you're getting an awful lot of money back and that is going into production. So it's not \$600 million; it's \$600 million *plus*. So, it is a base. It gives a sort of a super-Canadian dispenser of production funds that we've never had, and it's a self-financing thing. You don't ask the government for anything. It is the users who are paying for that service and paying a very small amount.

Well, this became clear, and this is something we did not know before.

Cinema Canada: Before what?

Marc Gervais: Before the hearings. Before the calls. But when that became known, when you hear all these groups on this specific question, suddenly you're there, 'My God, and here we've been talking for years to get a base for Canadian production.' And this is not punishing anybody. It's giving the private sector, the discretionary sector, a head start. It's giving them the big box-office hits that everybody wants to see and so on, whereas the universal system is not going to go into that league. It is not going to be selling *Superman*... It's going to be doing Canadian programming. Its Canadian content is going to be almost 100%.

Cinema Canada: But in the original proposal by the universal network it wanted to have big-budget movies as well.

Marc Gervais: TeleCanada? Yes, but we're not talking about TeleCanada now. Maybe everybody should go and burn little lights in front of a TeleCanada shrine because they brought forward a bunch of new insights, or brought back to life certain things that had been said before, in a different context, and that hadn't convinced anybody. But in the present hearings, when we were really looking seriously at this production base, TeleCanada presented all of these facts.

Now, there are enormous problems contained by the thought of a universal system, and one of them is, where do you put it in the box? It brings in a whole huge problem of tiering, and that's going to be subject of the hearings around October, November. There's also the question of who's going to run it.

Universal: just a tease?

Cinema Canada: Is it certain that there will be a universal application hearing?

Marc Gervais: It is not certain. The

question is still open, but it's right there in the decision that this is now where the CRTC is heading. For that to be achieved, the CRTC has to solve all these problems of tiering on the TV box, which is a very complex thing. It has to link the cost associated with tiering, the problem of how much the cable companies would get out of this, if anything. It's soliciting different groups around the country to come forward with suggestions, including the CBC, including TeleCanada, if they wish to come again. This time the groups will have had the time and thought it out. They will be very solid in both languages.

Cinema Canada: In reading the document, one feels that not all the commissioners share your enthusiasm; that not all were ready to say that they simply didn't understand the ramifications of the universal system before making the call. What sort of in-fighting went on to come to the decision as it stands?

Marc Gervais: It was the thing that made me understand this crazy, self-contradictory phenomenon that is Canada, and that makes Canada pathetic in so many ways and yet, perhaps the best country in the world to live in in some other ways. It's the constant compromise.

You had on the one hand, the national, and on the other hand you had the regionals, you had on the one hand free enterprise, discretionary, and on the other hand you had Canadian culture, a universal system. And the commissioners came into it, and as the discussions progressed we're still espousing certain causes but gradually you begin to understand. The decision is a compromise document. It is a document that says, 'Okay, the free enterprise sector. We give you the head start, a year's head start. We honor our call in the spirit of the call. You have a chance, and if the Canadian people really want it and you give them the service they want, they'll stay with it. If they don't, they won't. But we were very serious about this Canadian production and we have a way, now, that has become clear to us, that was not clear before, and we're backing it up with that thing which is the universal. And of course, that will be subject to review every number of years. So of course, it's a compromise between the two; and yes, we'll give the regionals a chance too, those who are organized and whom we think are viable operations.'

We don't know what's going to happen. Maybe in some places the regionals will kill the national, maybe the national will kill the regionals everywhere. Maybe a francophone regional is simply impractical because who's going to pay \$15 to see what? Dubbed films? It is conceivable that the only system that's going to give the francophone a production base, make it a vigorous thing financially, is the universal, strange as it may seem...

Cinema Canada: So it was not an assumption on the part of the CRTC that giving 6 licenses meant that all 6 were viable, that all the birds would fly...

Marc Gervais: There were certain regional licenses that were not granted; there, the judgment was that this thing will not fly. But the one in the Maritimes, the one in Ontario, the one in Alberta - those are the three regionals along with the major national bilingual (First Choice) which were thought to be viable. Then there is LAMB; it's a non-competitive one. The people who buy LAMB

would either buy it anyway and are not interested in the others, or they'll buy two. They can afford it. They can afford the Sunday Times. Then the multilingual in B.C. That's a very specific thing; we'll see if that works.

Once you get a universal in, then it's the market that will determine more and more the discretionary side, and if the market wanted 80 channels, and could survive at that level, well, who knows what the future will bring? But you would still have the solid production base. If Canadian product in the dramatic areas, movies, television programs, serials, can compete, it'll have the money now to compete. Surely when you start off with that kind of base and add to that the private investments outside the pay-TV area, we're going to finally be in a strong position. If we're not good enough, well, then let's all close shop and quit. We will have had the chance, it's up to us to do good programming, we're also going to end up doing good, cultural, artistic programming. Artists come to the top, inevitably. We can't protect program production anymore than that. That's been the decision. We are going to try to make sure

"Maybe everybody should go and burn little lights in front of a TeleCanada shrine because they brought forward a bunch of new insights... in a different context."

the carriers are Canadians. We are going to try and make sure the carriers are not the owners, that they are not the producers and the exhibitors. We are trying to keep those units as separate as possible though it's impossible to do it totally.

So, my enthusiasm is for a position which I endorse now, but did not at the beginning. I was made to see other realities which Canada always drags in and which, to me, are realities that emasculate us whenever it comes to a big decision. Whenever you have a big law to put through in the culture area, the conflicting provincial-federal jurisdictions always complicate things. The North American bent for private enterprise versus government encouragement of the arts and the media is another thing that is always inhibiting in our system.

Cinema Canada: But it's always been the government who has been the primary producer of films, and the keeper of the faith in cultural production...

Marc Gervais: That's right, but it's also the government that, through legislations or rules of the game, made possible Hollywood's total domination of Canada in cinema. We have a whole history of that...

Cinema Canada: So the plan is to let

the discretionary system run, and see what the people want. Then, if there appears to still be a market, to see just how far one can go with universal.

Marc Gervais: No. The discretionary systems will probably go into effect around January 1st. But before that, number two wave is coming. It was announced in the decision that we would examine universal as soon as possible. So, that would hopefully be before the end of the year. It takes so long to implement all those things that even if we find the way to get a universal going that's not going to come in January. It takes another year, almost a year or six months or whatever. So, the other will get a headstart but it's not what the other does that's going to determine whether or not the second step takes place. That discussion is coming hopefully a couple of months before the first discretionary is launched.

How, the future... We'll have to wait a number of years to find out if First Choice succeeds, or if the groups in Alberta and the Maritimes succeed, and so on and so forth. We'll have to see, too, if a group comes forward from Quebec or New Brunswick and Ontario, for the francophone regions...

It's almost impossible to set up really clear legislation in these areas now because they are expanding and changing so much. And when Anik B is launched again, that's going to change the game radically once more. We're also going to be faced with the questions, is there an open air? What about the dishes? Can you imagine if we reach the point where it was total open air and everybody could have their dish for \$500 or \$600 and grab any number of signals? There are questions here of scrambling and unscrambling devices, and international legislation. These are huge, huge things that could change this whole context... If Sony had ready for the market now big home screens that you could plug into your pre-existing stereo so that the image you see is better than 70mm in the cinemas... Who's going to want pay-TV if he has so many other options?

By the time these options become marketable, it has to be at least five years. Maybe we only have that five or ten-year chance, at least at the financial level, to give the Canadians a base, so we'd better grab it now. In that context, it makes the solid production base more desperately important now than ever. Because once you get into the cassette thing, and into a master computer that you can phone for a cassette any time you want, are you going to be able to say: 60% Canadian?

The old tug-of-war

Cinema Canada: But then why did the CRTC make its decision to license a discretionary system first, dividing up the market that way? No one knows what the public's reaction will be or how much it will be willing to pay. The CRTC's decision, which has been criticized by everyone, will drive up the prices. Then, to think of increasing the competition still further compounds the complications. How do we know how the public in the regions, where there is a choice, will behave?

Marc Gervais: There, we have the profoundist reflection of this reality that is Canada. And this tug-of-war always between the national and the regional...

If you abstract from wave two, which is what we've been talking about - this

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universal coming – then your point is very crucial. But if you look at the intention of the CRTC on pp. 17, 18 or 19 of the decision, if they are intending to follow it up with the second wave, it changes the ball-game radically in terms of Canadian production. Even if wave one is somewhat weakened, wave two is so gigantic and safe – it's fool-proof. People are not going to stop getting cable.

Cinema Canada: *But this is what seems so incoherent in the document... Marc Gervais:* In all fairness to the players, the CRTC was very keen on naming some people [awarding licenses], and it's not secret that you could have taken maybe four or five of the best applications and give good reasons why this one should be named over that one. It's not a question that First Choice was infinitely superior to anybody else. It was a difficult decision.

But supposing now, you go to Ontario. Supposing you have Ontario Independent cutting into First Choice, and taking away 2/5 of First Choice's audience. That means it will take 2/5 of its total revenue away from First Choice. Well, First Choice still has to give 35% of its gross revenue (or of that 3/5) to Canadian production and Ontario Independent has to give 35% of its total revenue, so it still comes to the same amount. It has even been calculated that if you have the two competitors, you'll probably have a greater penetration rate than if you just have the one. Therefore, 35% of total revenue is going to be a little bit more, so in terms of the production side it helps. In terms of the competitors, it doesn't help. They're not happy. Because each have their overhead and all that and they still have to give that 35%...

Cinema Canada: *There's a lot of skepticism. Many think that the licensees are not going to be able to get the prices they want on American product, and that they will be back in a few years to say they can not honor parts of their commitment. Competition is healthy when the market is healthy, but when it's not, two hungry competitors can just as well kill each other.*

Marc Gervais: The onus now is placed on the winning licensees. They have to spend 35% of their gross revenue on Canadian production, so it's their problem. They have to get together and work out the ground rules among themselves. They are not out to gouge at each other but to protect their investments.

Now, that doesn't work on the francophone side, because the francophones have only the national. They don't have their own regional. If they did, we would be back to the same phenomenon. Some say there's a francophone group really getting together but we will have to wait and see. If there isn't any regional channel, obviously, the national cut for the francophone side is going to be a bit smaller. That's why the universal then becomes the absolute savior for the francophone side.

The third point was about monopolies. What is the healthier situation? A total monopoly for pay-TV in Canada?

At least at the start? Or, some kind of controlled competition at the start? The whole monopoly looks very simple and all that, boy, you are giving one group power. That's something that made people hesitate. In some areas, certain groups have a total monopoly and they can practically do what they want to. So, right from the beginning, the CRTC introduced the notion, 'boy, you're not going to have it all your own way.'

Cinema Canada: *The Canadian distributors had hoped that there would be some regulation that would oblige the licensees to buy from them as opposed to buying directly from the Americans. They argued that if the licensees were allowed to buy directly from Americans, there would simply be no Canadian distributors left. And others have said that as a result of the decision, pay-TV has just been given on a platter to HBO. That, because the amount of money per hour that First Choice is going to be able to spend (down from \$350,000 to \$175,000) has fallen, that will lead increasingly into co-productions with the Americans for pay-TV both in the States and in Canada – that the CRTC has engineered the integration of the Canadian production community with the Americans...*

Marc Gervais: I'm appalled to say that I hadn't even thought about that one myself. I don't know. And if I don't know, what does that mean in terms of the other commissioners, who haven't been spending their lives more or less in film?

Interested people should raise that point, prepare a well-articulated case, and send that to the Commission because that's a crucial, crucial point. I remember the issue being raised vaguely but in the avalanche we were struggling to survive, what were we going to do?

During the hearings the CRTC came across as: 'Look, we're in this game too, boys. We don't know what the whole solution is... we're just starting.' So, I think that a thing like this is crucial... This whole question of the control, the automatic control, via Home Box Office or anybody else, as the distributor in Canada, is crucial. The CRTC is asking for input, is asking for points, for valid arguments. Everyone must realize that this is new and that we need input. There can be by-laws, there can be things like that at anytime.

Cinema Canada: *You make a big point about 35% of revenues returning to Canadian production but, as we've seen with the tax incentive, revenues are not necessarily used to make Canadian films. Are there any measures the CRTC can take to see that the money goes into Canadian films?*

Marc Gervais: There was another hearing on Canadian content in television. I was on that panel too. There were the same players again, and the emotions and the passions had just happened a month before. So, when we had the week on Canadian content, we were all tired; the people giving the papers were tired, the people listening to them were tired, so there were no sparks, but hopefully a few ideas came across.

There's an interesting shift going on in the CRTC, trying to get a more supple and more meaningful definition which is not like the present one. It's different in certain areas, and I can't mention it now because that still has to be approved by the whole commission. Furthermore, there's going to be another hearing on it,

because it's such a crucial question.

But there is the second aspect. You can't possibly make an absolute legislation where you're going to say that Ingmar Bergman cannot direct a film in Canada... that's stupid. You have to make rules that are supple. At the same time, you get into that area of financing. Now, it seems to me that we've been through the process, through everything that was negative about it as well as some good things about it. The industry itself, from its own perception, must know that if you make junk, it's not going to pay off in the long run... If the licensees give pay-TV away to groups that are simply going to be Hollywood North, I think that the whole community has to rise up and say: 'listen, this is a farce!' But we can't legislate. The CRTC can't say, 'you can't make films that look like Hollywood movies...'

Cinema Canada: *Why not take that 35% and give it to an agency which will disburse funds for Canadian production?*

Marc Gervais: That's what would happen with a second wave, that's what

"It's not secret that you could have taken four or five of the best applications and give good reasons why this one should be named over that one."

would happen with the universal. But with the discretionary, we are going along the way of private enterprise and these groups have made their pledges.

Bilingual channel misunderstood

Cinema Canada: *How did you arrive at the decision to license First Choice? Especially when you had to suggest that they revamp their French service?*

Marc Gervais: Oh, that was such a minor, minor change. Nobody understood. First Choice killed itself working out a system which would not give the advantage to the English side in the context, say, of Montreal. They came up with this idea for one bilingual channel. Well, most of the commission said: 'Nice try, but that's too complicated. Give people the choice, for Pete's sake...' So then the papers said First Choice didn't care about the francophones, they were only giving a diluted French service. It wasn't diluted at all. It just meant that 24 hours a day, instead of having repetition of six-hour chunks four times, they'd only have repetition twice in French and twice in English. As it is now, we're going to have the benefit of 25 hours, six units, four times on one channel, four times on the other. So they

were criticized because of conclusions that were the exact opposite of what their intentions were. Their intentions were to favor the French market but the CRTC, I think rightfully, said, 'no, let the people decide on that question...'

Cinema Canada: *How did the CRTC counter the charge that, in fact, it has not let free competition play from the moment that it said, 'we'll take First Choice, but you apply somebody else's French channel idea'?*

Marc Gervais: The only group that tried this refinement was First Choice. Every other group had two systems, so that wasn't really an essential change. No matter what group came forward, there would have had to be changes, perhaps in other areas: percentage in programming, Canadian content, ownership, etc.

Cinema Canada: *But why First Choice?*

Marc Gervais: Difficult, I don't think I could answer that. At the end, First Choice seemed to emerge pretty clearly... As far as the CRTC is concerned, it was a no-win situation. It didn't matter who was picked, you're going to really disappoint some people and some put so much work into it and everything... But there I'm really not answering because I think it's going to be contentious and so on and so forth...

Cinema Canada: *One of the criticisms leveled at the process was that it was very difficult to compare the various applications. Each used different measures and different base figures. How did the CRTC resolve these problems?*

Marc Gervais: That was our major problem. The call was made extremely open. Why? Because it was our first. We didn't have experience, clear-cut laws, norms and categories and all that. The competitors themselves would help create the norms and see how imperfect the process is. The situation requires common sense and hopefully great motivation and a lot of knowledge, but there is an element of the lottery in it too.

The only experience one had is from the United States where it's a totally different situation, where pay-TV itself was used to create the cable system. In Canada, it already existed so, the whole thing is radically different. And then in the States you don't have the necessary obsession for American programming that we have here for Canadian programming.

Cinema Canada: *Were you surprised that, even given that no-win situation, the CRTC managed to disappoint just about everyone?*

Marc Gervais: No. The only thing that surprised me was the lack of interest in finding out what the game plan was, the whole game plan. That scandalized me a bit. Nobody picked up on the overall plan, which is quite interesting.

Cinema Canada: *Because, in your understanding of it, the very most important thing is a promise of a second wave...*

Marc Gervais: Well, it's the whole package. Now, somebody who is a cultural nationalist will say the second wave is what's the most important. Somebody who's a champion of free enterprise and says 'give the Canadians what they want, which is American films,' will say: it's the first wave... ●

The forest from the trees

On March 1, the Canadian Association of Motion Picture Producers (CAMPP) sponsored a day-long seminar entitled "The Forest and the Trees: a National Cinema and How to Get It."

CAMPP gathered an impressive panel of filmmakers who spent the day sharing experiences, and fielding questions from the audience. Pat Lovell (producer, Picnic at Hanging Rock, Gallipoli) and Fred Schepisi (director, The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith, Devil's Playground, Barbarosa) spoke of the Australian experience while David Puttnam (producer, Midnight Express, Chariots of Fire) and Michael Hodges (director, Get Carter, Flash Gordon) spoke of the United Kingdom. Bo Jonsson (producer of Montenegro and past director of the Swedish Film Institute) shared his views on filmmaking in Sweden and Alain Tanner (director, La Salamandre, Jonas Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000) added notes from Switzerland. Louise Ranger (head of the Institut québécois du cinéma) represented Quebec while Allan King, vice-president of CAMPP acted as moderator.

King's opening remarks follow, punctuated with comments from the panelists. Connie Tadros sums up the day's proceedings.

We are first of all concerned with the place of our national cinema in an international community. We hope that each of our panelists will tell us something of the development of a distinctive cinema in their own countries and from their own perspectives.

Each of our countries has employed incentives to feature film production. We would like to hear how they have worked, what they have accomplished, what problems have arisen, what directions we might pursue for the future, and what notions we might develop for co-operative action.

In this country, there has been a fundamental confusion between an industrial and a cultural strategy for film. The Canadian Film Development Corporation was set up 15 years ago to stimulate an industry which, it was assumed, would be self-supporting. It hasn't proved so. And, I guess, no film industry is completely self-supporting in any Western industrial country, except the United States.

Thus, at least here, the premise for continuing government incentives would have to be the need for our own expression in feature films in order to preserve and enhance the distinctive qualities of the national culture. This is arguable, I suppose.

Will the culture wane if it doesn't express itself? Artists think so. Does the tax-payer agree? If we are headed for a global village, as the late Marshall McLuhan said, why drag our feet? Isn't it better to break down the barriers between countries rather than raise them? And how is freedom of expression served by barring performers, filmmakers and other artists from free movement across borders?

One way of answering these questions is to ask which one of us would hand over the electronic keys to virtually every circuit in our brain except under the extreme duress of an insane asylum. Yet our communications system is the brain of our society and we have turned over most of the circuits; along with the eyes, ears, voice-box, tastebuds, fingertips, and, especially, the erogenous zones.

In Canada we only occupy 3 1/2% of our own theatrical screen time, and about the same in television drama. Almost all the rest is American. Do all the countries represented on this platform together occupy 3 1/2% of American film and TV screen time? Probably not. What we are advocating in any case, is much less a matter of restriction than a major increase in our own production and a much freer access to the world for

the rest of us.

These are fundamental questions we should address and we are glad to have with us filmmakers who have played a major role in their own national cinemas and, at the same time, now deal with the working realities of the American film world from an international viewpoint.

On the question of incentives, we will be particularly interested in the operation of the Australian Capital Cost Allowance, the tough Treasury rulings on leverage which apparently brought that industry to a halt in 1980, and the likely effects of the new 150% Capital Cost Allowance, the 50% tax holiday on profits, and so on.

In part, we have had a similar experience in Canada. Our Department of National Revenue attacked many of the tax deferral schemes set up in the period 1975-78, which were the financial base of our first substantial crop of good films. The replacement schemes of '79-80 proved disastrous for investors and produced a flood of films, some of which lacked either commercial or creative merit. 1981 produced some splendid films but investment, wincing from the sour taste of the preceding two years, has almost disappeared.

So at the moment we open up pay-TV and direct-to-home satellite transmis-

"In the '60s, the government brought in a regulation that 50% of the content on television had to be Australian. And that really made a dramatic change concerning our indigenous presence on television. A lot of companies started turning out imitation American shows - police shows and soap operas and all of those things. But you couldn't get away from the fact that they were Australian. They were amateurish, they were very cheap, but they went straight to the top of the ratings. Within a very short time, four or five of the top ten programs were Australian, and now, I think, eight of the top ten programs are Australian... What brought the public around more than anything else were the comedy shows, because we have such a different sense of humour and such a different language. Nevertheless, in the cop shows the streets were our streets, they were our people, and our cars, and the people related to the familiarity despite the rawness of the programs."

Schepisi

"National identity? One can hide behind it and make a lot of bad films. It's hard enough to find your own identity, let alone the national identity... In the main the public doesn't care at all about U.K. pictures."

Hodges



● The panelists (l to r): Alain Tanner, David Puttnam, Fred Schepisi, Louise Ranger, Michael Hodges, Patricia Lovell, Allan King and Bo Jonsson

photos: R. Hugh McLean

sion, our capacity to attract investment to our own films has all but stopped; so has production.

Which brings us to a question which I don't believe we, in this country, have ever really addressed. I'd be interested in our guests' views on the same point with respect to their own countries.

If we do believe that our countries need popular, dramatic entertainment of their own, then we must determine how much. What level of dramatic production is necessary for us to retain a presence in the minds of our own audiences.

It is our position that this country requires, at a minimum, fifty feature-length films a year in the \$1.5 to \$2.5 million budget range - films mostly aimed at television but which might also have release, at least in this country, in theatres. We also need at least 12 to 15 theatrical films in the \$5 to \$10 million range if our audiences are to have special occasion feature films in which they can take special pride and which will have good prospects of release to international audiences. That would give us one Canadian movie per week nestled among the 15 free television, the two pay-TV channels we are likely to have, and goodness knows how many direct-to-home satellite signals - many of which will run 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is not a lot of films for a presence; some will say it's a lot to produce. We will argue the case with pleasure and confidence. It is, after all, no more than we produced in each of the two years preceding last year's collapse, and we produced those numbers in four months of each year.

I should underscore the fact that I am talking here about anglophone Canada and I would like to hear what Louise Ranger and her colleagues feel is an adequate presence for French language films in theatres and television in her province.

To achieve that level of production we will require an incentive at least as strong as the current Australian system. To achieve a useful industrial level of non or partially Canadian production, we would, in fact, propose a three-tiered system for discussion, namely:

First, a 150% Capital Cost Allowance for films with virtually 100% Canadian content, and in addition, a 50% holiday on profits from such films - as we understand Australia provides.

Second, a lower allowance - say 100% either claimable in one year or spread over two - for a lower level of Canadian content. This could be either the point structure in force this year or, perhaps, the one in force last year.

Third, a lower allowance still for films with no restrictions on content except with respect to reasonable expenditures in this country.

It would be essential to ensure that such allowances be applied so as to avoid bunching all production in the last quarter of the tax year. (Bunching has not only caused horrendous production problems in this country, but also to the rest of the world we are in danger of appearing to live in an eternal twilight of ice and slush. Not inviting.)

Will the government support this level of activity with a careful mix of tax incentives and pay-TV funds carefully adjudicated on a cost-benefit basis? Can government and citizens come to understand why Canada needs a distinctively national cinema and how to achieve one? Can the film industry itself unite on a set of proposals which will maintain an industrial cinema base and

achieve a distinctively Canadian film output in numbers sufficient to help us and our children remain Canadian?

It will be particularly intriguing to hear the views of our panelists on content regulations in their countries and their views of them - particularly with respect to stars, writers, and directors. The Australian films with which we are familiar seem virtually 100% Australian cast, written, and directed. With the notable exceptions of *Chariots of Fire* and *Get Carter*, Britain has often seemed as much a soundstage and special effects lab for American blockbusters as a source of British films. Levels of national

content have been intensely debated here. How do our guests feel about the matter?

I'd like to close on a personal note. You may have guessed that I am a strong advocate of national cinema; but as such, I resent the fact that the view is so often thrown into a false dichotomy of national vs international cinema. I've been lucky enough to make films all over the world and have treasured the experience.

This is a country of immigrants. At its best moments it has treasured its diversity, taken pride in its multi-culturalism, eschewed a melting-pot philosophy.

And at its most characteristic, it is passionately internationalist.

One of the great pleasures of cinema is its international character, its diversity, its many different and often enthralling voices. Advocating a national cinema is not about restriction, but, rather about preservation and liberation - making sure that we have as many voices as our ears can hear, as many visions as our eyes can see. It is not about restriction to one language, one accent. Our friends to the south are devoted to this in principle; we would like to help them improve their practice.

Allan King ●

"The U.K. could exist on an American diet completely, so one must fight public apathy. If you can't have a television industry, then you certainly can't have a film industry... Does the U.K. need a film industry? It's like religion. You believe it or not."

Putnam

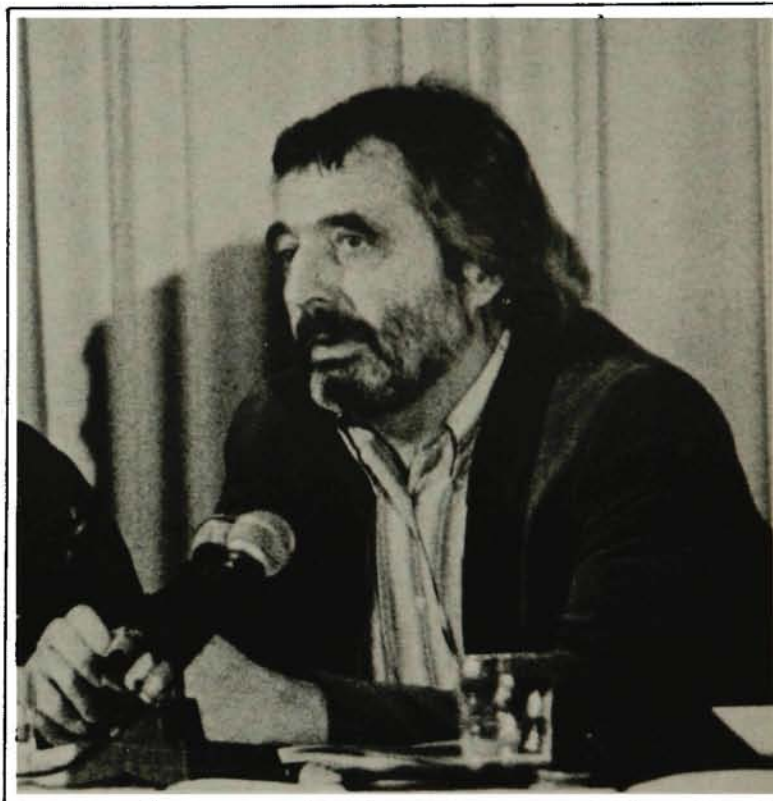
"The changes came (in 1969-70) because of us. We had been waiting in the wings too long. We had never been allowed to take major creative roles in any of the films we did, and we all had a lot of film experience and a great desire to make films. We figured we couldn't wait any longer for people to come and hand us scripts and hand us money and do all that.

It was happening on television because we'd lobbied for it. It was happening in our theatres. We were writing our own plays for the first time, and they were not being produced just in coffee-shop houses and experimental underground theatres, they were happening in the establishment theatres and being accepted. The writers were wanting to write the films, and the novelists wanted to write for films and we were being prevented from doing so.

So there was just a very very concerted and determined effect on behalf of all the filmmakers, and we hit at a political time. There was about to be a change in political powers, so the reigning government needed to do something to get publicity to reliven its image. These factors combined, and the film development corporation was soon established, as was an experimental film fund and a development film fund.

"You have to realize that Canada was the model for everything that's happening in Australia. That 'originally, we looked at the Canadian Film Development Corporation, the National Film Board of Canada, the Canadian tax incentives, and we used to get the Canadians to come out, years ago, and tell us how to go about it. What were the advantages and disadvantages. We used to get the Swedes to come out and tell us how to go about it. We examined their system, your system, the English system, everything. And a refinement of your system seemed to be what was best for us at that time. So now that the taxation incentives are coming, it's again a refinement of what you people were doing, and an extension of it, and an avoidance of the idiocies that were present in your legislation.

"I think that it's important that the whole situation is looked at, and not that individual bodies are responsible for individual things. One must have training grounds, experimental grounds, development grounds, culture, support in art - support as opposed to industry support and commercial financing. All



● Alain Tanner

of those aspects are important and should be seen as a whole and integrated. There should be integration with theatre and television. If you're supporting theatre, you are drawing on writers, ideas and actors. Hopefully, they will cross-pollinate with television and film."

Schepisi

"If the institutions prevent the making of 'sense', then they must be fought and they must be destroyed."

Tanner



● Fred Schepisi

● Michael Hodges



"The Australian Film Commission is not a free enterprise organization under any circumstance because, of course, it's under government and it gets a government allocation. This year, we are going to have to fight for that allocation to keep it on the level that it is at (roughly \$6 million a year). Because the tax incentives came in, various members say 'look, now the filmmakers have got this, why do they need that six million?' and you point out that you don't have filmmakers unless you're willing to invest in the early stages. No private sector is going to give seed money for scripts, is going to help our youngsters make short films, is going to subsidize things like the Australian Film Institute."

Lovell

Dreams, anger, confidence

At the end of the day, there is no clear answer to the question of how to get a national cinema. There are suggestions of measures that have been taken in other countries, ideas about situations to promote and others to avoid. Mostly, there is recognition that the problems don't change very much from country to country. "Films and national identity go in waves," said Puttnam. "It's a question of confidence as much as anything else."

There was general agreement that some sort of political will must precede any attempt to establish a national cinema. In Australia, the Restrictive Trade Practices legislation opened the theatres to Australian films, and the Export Rebate Tax made it possible for filmmakers to take their films abroad. In Britain, the Eady Plan has worked for 30 years, providing funds regularly for production. Sweden, often in the avant-garde, has just levied a tax against the sale of video-cassettes. Revenues from the tax will augment the 10% levy which comes from the box-office of all films shown in the country, and all the monies will go back to the Swedish Film Institute for disbursement.

It would seem that the agencies which best support national cinema are those which are integrated. Jonsson insists that there would be no cinema in Sweden, were it not for the Institute which grants, invests, co-produces with television, runs film theatres, keeps the archives and represents the industry abroad. In Australia, the Australian Film Commission produces through Film Australia (similar to the National Film Board but having only 120 employees), makes grants to young filmmakers, invests heavily in script and project development, supports the film school, the national publication "Cinema Papers", and the Australian Film Institute (which runs three theatres), does thorough work in marketing/promotional strategy and even administers all revenues from films in which it invests, disbursing directly to investors.

Although CAMPP was obviously aiming to find support for its suggestion of an increased capital cost allowance, the panelists were wary. Puttnam remarked that a 100% deduction which had been available in the U.K. for 18 months would probably be withdrawn because of abuse. While the Australians were characteristically up-beat about avoiding the pitfalls which Canada knows too well, it is too soon to tell. "Since the incentives, known filmmakers have not benefitted," said Lovell. "Three-fourths of the films being made now are the hybrids we had been avoiding."

Financing was everyone's problem, and Tanner and Puttnam especially insisted that keeping budgets down was the battle to be joined. When the "mega-buck" projects take over, there is little left, and continuity of work becomes the problem. Puttnam felt he had lost some of the finest young talent - Alan Parker, Ridley Scott - because he, as a producer, could not keep them employed on a regular basis. Both Hodges and Schepisi were working in the States, and the consensus was that artists would move about, and that only the promise of secure and steady work would keep

them at home.

Everyone on the panel agreed that the government bodies must give priority to the younger generation of filmmakers. And most felt that support should be clearly made on a grant basis; that one must acknowledge that young filmmakers cannot turn a profit the first time out but that they must be able to try repeatedly if they are to establish themselves.

The barriers of "culture" and "commercialism" broke down as all acknowledged that no one knows whether a film is "commercial" until it starts its run, and that repeatedly, it is the unexpected film which makes a hit. To do away with the government agencies and rely solely on tax incentive plans to bolster a film industry would be disastrous, all agreed, seriously reducing the chances of making that unexpected film.

In the final analysis, creating a national

cinema seemed more a question of attitude than anything else. Puttnam insisted that dreams, anger and confidence were what made good films. Schepisi urged Canadians to pull together: "You can create an ambience for fellow filmmakers. It's a matter of persistence, determination and blackmail." Tanner, viewing the proceedings from the relative quiet of the Swiss 'industry' where two men make up the entire bureaucracy and where from one to five films are made a year, commented simply, "All our films are ambitious films. We make no crap."

The panelists all shared one thing: the passion for good films, coming from a centeredness of self-awareness. As the day grew to a close, the Canadians became less and less able to articulate just what the problem was in Canada, and Hodges became more and more aggressive. "I don't understand your

problem. You've made all these films. Explain it to me. What is the problem in Canada?" There was no clear answer, for no one in the audience was prepared to say to what degree the cynicism resulting from our film boom had wreaked moral havoc on our filmmakers.

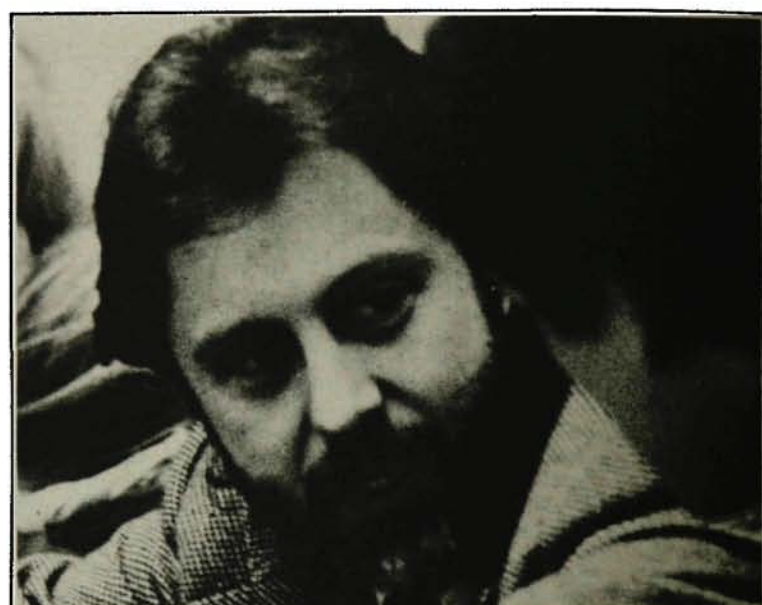
We need a break-through film to turn the situation around. One which does well and communicates a sense of pride and confidence. Puttnam had no idea, as he sat on the panel, that he would shortly win the Oscar for Best Film with *Chariots of Fire*. But what joy there was as the Oscar was accepted and the cry went out, "Watch out. The British are coming!" It was a moment which just might signal a revival of British cinema. When political will and creative enthusiasm come together in Canada, we might be ready for a real wave of national filmmaking too.

Connie Tadros ●

"I think it's incorrect to set up a structure that only supports very cultural and non-commercial pictures because then you're really out of touch with public tastes and, then, who are you talking to? You are talking to a handful of people. It is, however, important that the commercial desires don't overcome everything else because, then, everybody starts trying to assess what a commercial picture is and that is an impossibility. It has been proven in Hollywood, time and again, and everywhere else in the world. There are no formulas for commercial films. It is always a surprise when the next film becomes a major commercial success like *Kramer vs Kramer* or *Star Wars*. Neither of those films were believed to be commercial. Now of course, everybody is imitating them. That's always the way. What happened with both those films (and happens with many other films) is that they were made with a vision and a passion by filmmakers against all odds, and then turned out to be commercial successes.

"So my belief is as follows. If you've got government people involved in those boards, then they should take the permanent staff positions and they should co-op onto the boards, on temporary service, people from the industry that can advise and assess and judge. The boards should do very little reading of actual projects. They should encourage individuals, investing in their track records, and in their potential. They should be prepared to take a young director, and producer, and give them money to make a number of films in which they are going to fail. But you'll see an improvement in each film. And if you don't see an improvement then by the third film, you say, 'This guy's never going to make it. Cut him off.' They have to prove themselves like they do in any other area or art in the world. But unless you take the chances to allow them to develop - and they've obviously got to go through some raw processes - unless you give them that chance, they're not going to develop. They're not going to get good and become confident and capable filmmakers. So the program is multi-layered. I'm talking about experimental, training and development and all of those things. Don't invest in projects; invest in people. That is the major thing."

"You've got taxation incentives and you've got boards (government agencies). What's happening in Australia is that they are trying to get rid of the boards and just go into taxation incentives. This



● David Puttnam

would be a crime. The taxation incentives will take care of the more obviously commercial moviemakers, and the people with reputations. The boards, however, can support the development of scripts, the seeding money, the development of the talent and the more peculiar experimental or artistic or less seemingly commercial picture that is culturally important, that is esthetically important and is important for the development and progress of films. Those pictures should be supported frankly on a straight-out grant basis. Because you know you're never going to get the money back, so why bother? Why not just make it a grant basis. You do it for art, you do it for opera, you do it for ballet. Are we not an art form?"

Schepisi

"There are two important political questions: How to interface with government? And how not to get government to interfere?"

Puttnam

"I think the important comparison between Canada and Australia is the make-up of the full-time and part-time commission [Board of Directors of the Australian Film Commission]. We are all members of the industry... Although the minister has final say in the choices, usually there is talk, and that consultation leads to a workable commission. We on the commission often disagree and disagree heartily, but we have great respect for one another, and it's workable."

Lovell



● Patricia Lovell

"You are a very, very big market. Don't ever deceive yourself. A huge market. It does seem to me that quite clearly you haven't used your own clout with the American majors to elbow your way in. I mean you are a voice that must be listened to. The U.S. majors cannot afford, there is no way in the world that they can afford to ignore Ottawa. If Ottawa chose to be difficult, the U.S. majors would come into line very, very quickly. And you'd be surprised how much economic and other help you could get."

Puttnam

"Jack Valente came to Australia threatening, talking a lot about beef quotas quite as I believe he did here. I'm sure Jack Valente and the Motion Picture Export Association and all those people are connected to the CIA, and none of us have any illusions about when the plug is likely to be pulled.

"It's because they are protecting a market that's very large that you have to realize that you're the second largest film market in the world. You have a very powerful position in relation to the American film industry. If you put the pressure on, both politically and economically, you are going to find yourself in a position where they will gladly help you in your own film production to preserve their market.

"What all this nonsense about coming in and teaching us means is that every independent producer who is unable to get his film produced in America wants to come up here and take advantage of the tax scheme... How long can you go on learning and being taught? And then why do you want to learn that system if you want to make your own stories and speak with your own voice? It's different, and it deserves to be different."

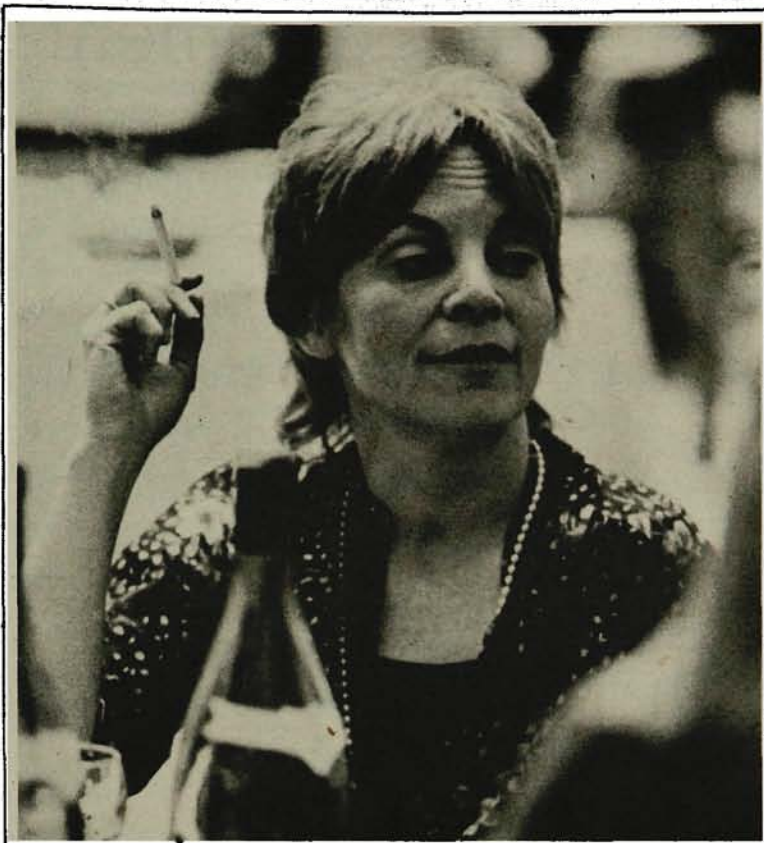
"We had to forget where we were and our distance. You've got to forget where you are and your closeness. You've got to start trusting in yourselves, being yourselves, and you've got to start believing yourselves. And once you do that, once you feel that, then the stories don't have to be that different, because you're not that different. You've got some different heritage, you've got some different approach, you have different ways of looking at things but you are very similar in a lot of ways. But if you are doing it with those differences, you are doing it with confidence, and in a way that you understand. And that's reflected. The pictures are then obviously being made with passion. They are centered and have an energy and an integrity that anyone will respond to, anywhere in the world."

"You have to start in your schools. Start educating in the schools about Canadian films, and about Canadian television, and Canadian plays. Then you have to get your press, and get the columnists and the critics, and romance them. Involve them in the problems, the problems of financing, the problems of distribution, in the agony of making the pictures so that they start to understand and get on your side. They will start to give you public relations and to educate the public. And get on television, and get on radio, and just barrage these people, romance them, you know, so that they start telling the public what they are missing out on. But they can only do that if you are going to deliver a real Canadian experience."

Schepisi



● Bo Jonsson



● Louise Ranger

"In the end, it's a question of self-regeneration. That's why my particular message to everyone is to put money into start-up situations and start it again. I believe passionately in film schools. Now obviously, a film school is only as good as the people who run it and the criteria under which it runs. But I think you have to accept as a given that you look for someone really first-class to run your film school. It always comes back to continuity, continuity of government interest, continuity of desire to make good films. And backing people's passions. Find the people you think have got the passion, make sure they've got the talent, and in the areas where they lack expertise, fund them to develop it. If you've got a film school, for God's sake send the students to L.A. Get them to queue up in Westwood, get them to get a sense of when an audience responds and why it responds. Get them to do the same job in London. Get them to do the same job in Rome and Paris for that matter. It's an international business and you need to get a sense of what audiences want."

Puttnam

"If you don't have a passion, you may just as well be making movies for a company, or for television or whatever—just slick, tack films. I do think that you Canadians were wooed and and over-wooed as it were, and because of a lack of confidence you thought maybe you had something to learn from the Americans. We are lucky in that we are so far away. That is our luck and, therefore, that very isolation helps us with our passion.

"England, right now is so depressing because of the lack of enthusiasm amongst a lot of filmmakers. I was there last year, and I thought, no wonder the British film industry is at rock bottom! I mean, nobody was saying anything enthusiastic or had any sort of verve or vitality about anything. Now that can be

got back. I think you need one breakthrough. What *Chariots of Fire* has done for the British film industry is tremendous. Nevertheless, they refuse in Britain, for instance, to consider that Alan Parker is any longer a British filmmaker. Alan is one of the best directors to ever come out of Britain, and his films, to my mind, have always been superb. Just because he works outside England some of the time doesn't mean that he is no longer British. I find that utterly ridiculous."

Lovell

"The only way of going about it [cutting down budgets and increasing the chance to recoup in the home market] is again, very clear and concise directives from central government. If central government is prepared to fund films of a specific size, the unions, in most cases, will go along with that kind of directive. Then a philosophy and scale of fees and crew sizes will be formulated which coincide with that. Most industries, in most countries, have only ever worked when they started from a secure domestic base. Only when you secure a

domestic base can you then develop the confidence to turn around and attack a foreign market."

Puttnam

"I don't want to fend people off [talking about HBO's visit to Australia]. I think they should all come. I just hope that we're going to be wise enough to look at the deals that they are offering. Very recently we had some people out who supported a lot of drama on PBS television. Now, to get the sort of thing they wanted, they're not going to interfere at all creatively. But I'll be wooed by anybody, but let's not say that I'm going to sign a deal if I think there's going to be tremendous interference, and if I think that the film will lose quality by being aimed at some section of the American market that is 'commercial.' Then I'd be very suspicious of any deals because I just believe fully that if you try to structure a film to appeal to the American market, and to the Australian market, you appeal to nobody. It's been proven again and again and again and again."

"I'm constantly looking at things to do because I really care. I desperately care. I will do anything, even get myself another job to support myself rather than do a line production job on a film that I really don't care about, because your name is on that film forever, and you have to live with that. Despite mortgages and all those awful things that happen in one's life, you do have to go back to the question, do you really want a film industry? And there's no easy explanation for how to get it except to try and get the confidence. You've got very good filmmakers here, but there doesn't seem to be that center because you're always asking, are the Americans going to like it? Damn it. Will the Canadians like it? Because I'm sure if the Canadians will like it, the Americans will."

"If you do something as we did with *Picnic at Hanging Rock*... the Australians nearly went off their heads because they thought, 'we didn't know we could do this!' Suddenly there was a feeling of 'oh, aren't we good!' And it has nothing to do with the filmmakers. It's the audience, it's feeling very proud of themselves. I think that's what the Canadians have got to do. They've got to make their audience feel proud of themselves and proud of their filmmakers. Once you do that, whatever film that is, that has an international emotion that will not only get to your home audience but will reach into America because it will be different to anything that's being screened there, and it will be so good they won't be able to resist it."

Lovell



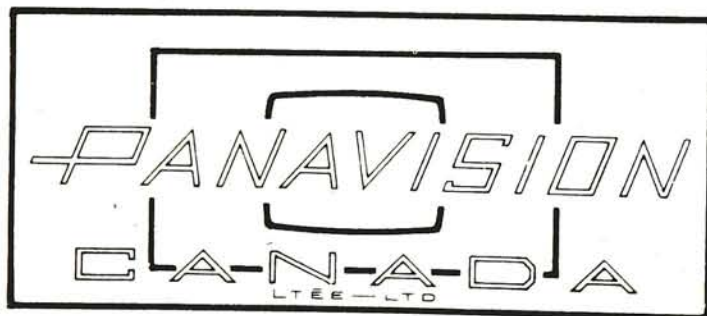
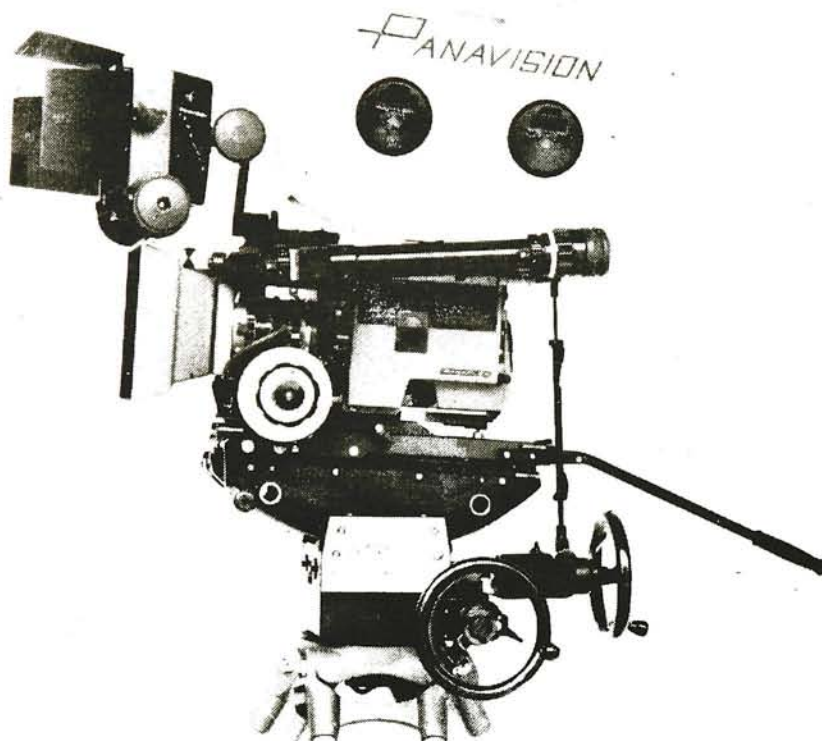
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