

## The Canadian domino

In a casual conversation during the World Film Festival of Montreal, one Major American distributor opined that there was absolutely no justification for an independent Canadian distribution sector: "There is nothing they can do that we cannot do better." This can lead one to feel that the Majors, viewing the expanses of the 'domestic' market from their bastions in California, just can't grasp the Canadian situation.

"The Majors finally perceived the problem for the first time Aug. 23," says one long-time observer of the political jockeying which has gone on for years between the Canadian government and the American-based distributors. He was referring to the new perceptions and conciliatory attitudes which reportedly resulted from a meeting between Quebec minister of Cultural Affairs Clément Richard, and three vice-presidents of the American companies. Present at the meeting were Richard Graff of United Artists/MGM, William Soady of Universal and Wayne Case of 20th Century-Fox.

The "problem" the observer was referring to is the domination of the American distributors in the Canadian market, and the unwillingness of those distributors to make any accommodations to render the situation more viable for Canadian distributors. It took the passage of Bill 109, Quebec's new cinema law (which, among other things, will now regulate distribution in the province) to bring about these new perceptions.

Echoes of the meeting were audible in the comments of several speakers at the World Film Festival the next day. Jack Valenti, in Montreal to lunch with the federal minister of Communications, Francis Fox, noted that "Quebec may find it reasonable to revise its laws." Valenti, speaking as president of the Motion Picture Association of America, the Majors' lobby, said it was his understanding that Quebec would hold public hearings about the law.

Harold Greenberg, president of Astral Bellevue Pathé, speaking on a pay-TV panel, but addressing himself to Quebec's law, said that it "sometimes takes a kick in the intestines" to make one admit certain situations, and that the signs now pointed to a possible resolution of the problems of distribution in Quebec.

Francis Fox, after his luncheon meeting with Valenti, told a press conference that the purpose of the meeting had been to "establish a working agenda with a view to improving things for the Canadian industry."

Nevertheless, two distinct scenarios concerning distribution in Quebec were being bandied about at the festival. The first, as written by the Majors and their supporters, goes thus: the provincial and federal ministers have understood that their laws (or proposed legislation, in the case of the federal government) are unacceptable to the Majors and will be modified. If modification is not forth-coming, some Major distributors will simply close shop in Quebec and withdraw all their films from circulation in the province. This should be sufficient to make the federal government withdraw planned measures concerning distribution which, according to insiders, mirror Quebec's legislation closely. The Federal film policy is expected this fall.

But according to Quebec's independent distributors, the real name of the game is "chicken." "They wouldn't dare withdraw from Quebec. With 20th Century-Fox and Columbia already distributing through Astral in Quebec and Triumph using Vivafilms, the Majors have too big a stake," declared one distributor.

Judging from comments made both by Valenti and other U.S. distributors, the importance of the law derives less from its immediate impact on the Quebec situation than its potential impact on the world market. Valenti referred to its "precedential" quality, admitting that it might spread like a virus "throughout the world environment." Speaking less colorfully, another distributor stated, "It's the old domino theory. Quebec is the first to fall. Canada will follow suit. If we don't stop it now, here in Quebec, there will be a law like this in every country of the world. We don't want that."

Meanwhile, André Steenhaut of the Minister's office in Quebec suggests that participants may have misread the intentions of the Quebec government. "The law concerning cinema has been voted and proclaimed. No changes can be made to it. The only discussions which will be held - and these will not be public hearings - revolve around the Régie du cinéma," said Steenhaut, referring to the body which will apply the various regulations to distribution and exhibitions. The detailed rules and regulations which will guide the Régie are still being written, and input from the industry is still welcome.

If the game is "chicken," then the show-down will come when Canada's minister of Communications renders his film policy public. Already, the policy has been put off from early summer to late fall. In a pre-election climate, the odds are that the federal government is in no mood to take on the Majors over the question of film distribution in Canada.

The editors

## Facelift : a post-scriptum

While I thank Lyn Martin for a very generous review of the National Film Board film *Daisy - The Story of a Facelift*, I have a slight problem with its last sentence. I quote: "And yes, Daisy gets her man." Apart from the fact that it makes me sound like the RCMP or a Wild Game Hunter, the statement is basically incorrect.

There was no mention of a man in the film. I can only assume that the information is based on a comment made by Jessica Savitch following the PBS broadcast. She said and I quote: "Daisy has found a new love interest".

The film per se makes it difficult enough to find that brave and wonderful fourth husband. Your statement that I am already taken can only help to lower the odds.

I would be grateful if you would print a retraction.

Daisy de Bellefeuille,

Director of Programming  
National Film Board of Canada,  
Montreal

We stand corrected. - Eds.

## Without prejudice

I think your choice of publishing a letter claiming one party wronged another is dubious at best, especially since Ms. Siegel has been and continues to be a regular contributor in your magazine. It is extremely unethical.

Her claim is where it belongs - in a court of law. There both sides can be heard and a decision made, unlike your publication which chose to print a condemning letter without even bothering to find the truth. I don't claim to know the law but it sure sounds like libel.

When this mess started Ms. Siegel and Mr. Van Riel threatened me by saying *Cinema Canada* will publish a story about it and consequently ruin my reputation. They also tried *The Gazette*, who upon looking at both sides decided against publication, perhaps until they could find the truth.

You have been duped. I paid Mr. Van Riel. I am not a big corporation. I am a struggling repertory theatre operator

trying to survive. Your thoughtlessness and lack of research hurts my chances. Either you research more thoroughly or change your name to *The National Enquirer*.

Richard Friedman  
Montreal

Mr. Friedman was telephoned several times concerning the above but declined to return our calls. - Eds.

## Erratum

A line of type was omitted from Pat Thompson's introduction to her Mini-reviews last month, which should have read that the films reviewed were not from a distribution company but from third-and fourth-year film students at York University.



## Newsmakers, please note

You've read their names and maybe your own many times in the pages of *Cinema Canada*, but you've often wondered what the others look like... Well, so have we. That's why, beginning with this issue, *Cinema Canada* puts greater emphasis on the faces that make up Canada's program production/distribution industry.

But don't wait for the news to happen first. Help us get a step ahead by sending along your photo to *Cinema Canada* now. That way, when you're in the news, we'll be ready to go with the story and your picture... while it is still news.