

Lunchtime, November 22nd, 1974. I get a call from Jacques Leduc. Speaking for the executive of the Association des Réalistes de Film du Québec, the A.R.F.Q., Jacques invites me to join the executive in some mysterious action. No, he can't tell me what it is over the telephone, — the lines may be tapped. Yes, it will take time — day, months maybe. No, once it starts that's it — you stay. I'm curious, nervous ambivalent. As the only anglophone member of the A.R.F.Q. at that time I'm flattered to be invited, I want to help, but, but . . . I'm trying to push one film, finish another, start another, I've got things I have to do, important things, plans for the evening . . . the kid . . . all the usual cop-out reasons. Maybe I should, maybe I could . . . but I don't, not right away. I tell Jacques I'll be there the next morning . . . Jail does not hold much appeal . . . And anyway I don't even know what they plan to do. And so on and so on. But I do know from Jacques' tone of voice that whatever is happening is something which will not pass unnoticed and I also know about the twelve years of polite struggle which have driven the A.R.F.Q. to take action.

It goes back to 1962 when Jean Lesage, the liberal premier of Québec, the man who led the province out of the extreme right wing Duplessis era, promised to table a film law that fall which would be "as important a law as the one which gave birth to the ministry of education." This was at the height of Québec's 'quiet revolution' when reforms in education were transforming Québec. It was no ordinary promise. At the request of the government Guy Côté and Arthur Lamôthe hurriedly drew up the details of a film law needed urgently so that it could be tabled right away. That was twelve years ago, and in those days the government was dealing with the Association Professionnelle des Cinéastes, the forerunner of the present A.R.F.Q.

Since 1962 there have been sixteen reports, one white paper, four draft laws, one law, Bill 52 dealing primarily with censorship, research trips to study foreign film industries, several provincial governments, even more Ministers of Cultural Affairs and numerous interventions, meetings, lunches, telegrams, and articles. Throughout, reassuring promises of action have been squeezed from who ever happened to be in a position to do anything about film in Québec at any given moment.

Many figures, including Marc Lalonde and Pierre Laporte, worked on the problem of the creation of a film industry in Québec — to say nothing of the legions of Québec film makers who spent days and weeks and months of their own time trying to educate the various governments about film, trying to get a film law tabled, trying to make it clear why a film industry was important to Québec. And twelve years have slipped by, turning the young hopefuls of the early sixties into exhausted middle aged men who nonetheless keep trying.

Out of all this came a number of possible measures which could be implemented whenever the basic law, la loi cadre, was tabled:

1. A film centre to administer the Québec film industry and to act as the focus of all film activities in Québec. Film makers see this centre as being independent or, at least, run by film makers and government together to avoid undue political interference. Needless to say, debate about how to run the envisaged centre continues even though there are already many other industries in Québec which have achieved co-management with government.

2. Quotas.

3. A tax on the box office receipts which would put between three and four million dollars per year into film in Québec.

BEYOND WORDS!

The

Robin Spry

4. A system to ensure that all films shown in Québec would be available in French.
5. Prizes for successful films, culturally important films, and money for some of the losses incurred by films which fail at the box office.
6. Taxes on profits leaving Québec.
7. A percentage of the box office returns to go directly to the Québec producers.
8. Money for the distribution, promotion and exhibition of Québec films.
9. Money for research, technical innovation, training, first works, archives, documentation, photographs etc.

In other words, what has been asked over the years is more or less what every other developed country in the world has: legislation to protect and promote a crucial aspect of the cultural and economic life of the society: film. The problems stemming from lack of this type of legislation are of course all too familiar to the film makers of English Canada who live and work in the oppressive shadow of American cultural and economic domination.

This shadow falls heavily on Québec too, but in addition the Québec film makers view the growing federal presence in film with unease. It helps to have the money of course, but they feel that more than ever, at a time when the last provincial election was won on a promise of "cultural sovereignty", there should be provincial funds as well going into every aspect of film in Québec. As it is now, if a Québec film maker wants to express himself on film he has to go to the NFB, the CFDC or the Canada Council, all federal agencies with federal sensibilities. Or he can try to submit himself to the inflexible information needs of the Office du Film du Québec.

The importance of the Québec government's participation in cinema has been stressed time and again over the years. For instance, Pierre Laporte in a Memorandum to

Québec Filmmakers Occupation of the Censorship Office



the Council of Ministers, January 25th, 1965 said, "The cinema is a cultural instrument of primary importance . . . it has been observed that cinema plays a particularly important role in countries with latin cultures. A Québec cinema . . . would help us in a powerful way to find our identity, to define ourselves and to express ourselves to a public larger than that reached by music, painting, literature and the other arts . . . Other countries which are not economically stronger than Québec find the means, with state support, to provide a cinema which is really their own, suited to their own public, and expressing the cultural realities of this public without any undue limitations."

The same year a White Paper from the then-minister of cultural affairs caused film makers to hope that something concrete might be imminent. It stated "the government must play a cultural role with respect to cinema as both an art and an industry. It is all the more urgent because no other art reaches as wide a mass audience as film. It is essential to adopt a 'loi cadre' for film and to create a Québec Film Centre which, once integrated with certain existing services, would be charged principally with helping film production, classifying films, and with the cultural and information activities of the cinema. In this domain government action, always respecting the freedom of the creator, is justified in-as-much as it helps the expansion of cinema as an art for the general good of the collectivity." Views similar to these have been repeated year after year by governments, civil servants, researchers and, of course, film makers.

And not just in Québec. In English Canada many of the same battles, the same arguments and the same frustrations exist. Will legislation in Québec help or hinder the implementation of film legislation in the rest of Canada? My belief is that it will help enormously. It will set a precedent for the other provinces, it will be a victory over the American conglomerates, a victory sorely needed if only to show that it is possible, and it will also pressure

the federal government into doing something at last. Even if Québec were to separtate after the next election, the impact of real provincial legislation from now until then on the other governments in Canada will be considerable. And with real signs of interest appearing in the West, as well as in the Toronto City government (if not in the Ontario government) a successful action in Québec would help everyone.

In 1974 it really began to look as if Bourassa's "Cultural sovereignty" would finally lead to the tabling of the long awaited "loi cadre" on film. In spite of a depressing year in Québec's feature industry, optimism grew. But instead, in the fall of 1974, Denis Hardy, the present minister of cultural affairs, seemed to be putting everything back to zero when he asked that the film situation in Québec be studied from scratch all over again. At a time when Claude Jutra had been out of work for a year, at a time when Gilles Carle had spent months looking for money for his next film, at a time when everyone was struggling, this was the final straw. All this is why the executive of the A.R.F.Q. gave up on words and turned to action. They met every night for a week and decided to occupy the only meaningful office of the Québec government in Montréal, le Bureau de Surveillance du Cinéma, the Québec censorship office. They chose to ignore the Office du Film du Québec because, as one filmmaker put it, "L'OFQ s'occupé pas de personne, donc nous n'occupons pas l'OFQ.", or "because the OFQ does not occupy itself with anyone, we won't occupy the OFQ."

The other reason for choosing the censorship office was tactical and symbolic. All films destined for theatres in Québec have to pass through this office. By closing it down, the distribution of films was brought to a halt only a month before the Christmas bonanza in the best box office year since 1946. The hope was to reduce the millions of dollars of profit from Québec theatres which would inevitably flow south to the U.S. after the holidays.

While I sat home wondering why I was not with them, six members of the A.R.F.Q. executive arrived at the censorship office at 4:00 p.m. on Friday, November 22nd, to announce to André Guérin that they were occupying his office. Guérin, who had himself worked on several of the reports advocating film legislation in Québec, and who was a friend of many of the film makers, suggested a diplomatic compromise; that he give his offices to the film makers for "study days" until the next evening. The film makers agreed. Guérin and his staff left and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, Jacques Gagné, Jacques Leduc, Roger Frappier, Jean Chabot and Jean Leclerc, joined later by Claude Jutra and Marcel Carrière, began to settle into their new quarters. Posters announcing the new management quickly appeared in the windows of the building at 360 McGill.

A general assembly of the A.R.F.Q. had already been called for 9:00 A.M. the next morning at the Iroquois Hotel. I arrived early, still uneasy about what I was getting into, only to find the Iroquois deserted. I began to hope that whatever Jacques Leduc had invited me to participate in was over. But word of the sit-in arrived and by 9:30 the main screening theatre of the nearby censorship office was filled with practically every professional Québécois film maker. There was little discussion. The action taken by the executive was unanimously supported and the vast majority of the members agreed to join in the sit-in until

evicted, or, preferably, until the aims of the sit-in were realized. These aims were the tabling of a "loi cadre" on cinema in the National Assembly in Québec and the calling of a public parliamentary commission on film. This latter was to try and ensure that the law be the most constructive one possible.

At a press conference called late that Saturday afternoon the following press release was given out to tell the public what was happening and why:

Association des Réalisateur de Film du Québec.

"In all countries where film is produced, governments aware of their cultural and economic responsibilities create a state organization to administer their own film industry.

The functioning of these organizations is founded on a legal framework (loi cadre) which controls the production, distribution and exhibition of films in order to protect the national product. In spite of representations made to successive governments by the film industry since 1962, in spite of the internationally recognised quality of Québec films, in spite of former and recent promises by the governments to administer the Québec film industry, and in spite of the formal promise made by the current government of "cultural sovereignty" for Québec, not only has Québec not fulfilled its responsibilities in film, it has left film to federal organizations and foreign interests.

In spite of fifteen years of pressure, studies, and work, we are still without a "loi cadre" and we are not at all hopeful of having one soon.

This is why the members of the A.R.F.Q. have decided to occupy the offices of the film censorship board of Québec."

A.R.F.Q.

The previous night, the minister of Cultural Affairs had left the Québec liberal party convention, which happened to be taking place in Québec city at the same time, to be interviewed about the sit-in by a radio station. A tape of this interview arrived and the minister's explanations were gleefully listened to by the film makers. When asked if the law might be tabled soon, Hardy replied with a number of vague promises, amongst which was a promise that he would announce the date of the tabling of "la loi cadre" the following Tuesday.

In response the A.R.F.Q. sent this telegram to premier Bourassa:

Monsieur Bourassa:

The words of your minister, M. Hardy, heard yesterday evening on CKAC seem strangely familiar to us. We thought we were hearing M. Arsenault, M. Laporte, M. Gabias, M. Tremblay, Mme. Kirkland Casgrain, M. Cloutier all over again. You must understand that after fifteen years these words have lost their effectiveness.*

In keeping with the unanimous wish of the general assembly, the film makers of the A.R.F.Q. will continue to occupy the Québec film censorship office until a loi cadre has been tabled and a parliamentary commission called.

A.R.F.Q.

(*The Québec Ministers of Cultural Affairs since 1962)

An evening general assembly was called at which the administration of the sit-in was organised. Committees were set up to look after supplies, communications, cleaning, press coverage, security and so on. Then the large group settled in for their first night with most of the membership present. With two large theatres, a library, two cutting rooms and several offices, space was plentiful. The problem was which of the evenings' entertainments to choose. The library was filled with film books and magazines, food worthy of Québec appeared in great quantity, the offices offered television and radio, there was the coverage of the sit-in and the politicians' responses, the corridors were filled with discussions and plots and then there were the films. Over a quarter of a million dollars' worth of prints lay waiting to be approved and



not a Québec film in sight. But with two theatres ready to roll, who could resist catching **Front Page**, **Deep Throat**, **Behind Green Doors** and many others? By the early hours of the morning most people were trying to sleep but the blaring sound tracks made it hard.

Very quickly it became apparent that the sit-in was getting a lot of attention and a lot of support. **Le Jour**, **Le Devoir** and **La Presse** covered it all at great length, averaging close to half a page a day for a while. Other francophone media provided a lot of air time, but only the CBC came through with any extensive coverage in English.

As a result of the media interest an indirect media dialogue was quickly established between the film makers and the politicians. Mixed into this exchange were rumours and memories. For instance, **Le Devoir** suggested



Scenes from "Bureau de surveillance occupé"

that Québec has made a deal with Ottawa not to legislate until Ottawa had done so first. Or that Lesage's law had been halted in 1962 by an influential visitor from Ontario.

And always the very strong sense that although Québec has been playing with film legislation since 1962 Ottawa, with the CFDC, had managed to overtake Québec in this domain with Québec's connivance. As Roger Frappier put it, "Québec has to act now. We've been waiting twelve years for Québec to keep its promises. That's enough. For twelve years Québec has been letting Ottawa act in her place, giving Ottawa every freedom to completely expro-

priate Québec cinema. This intervention by Ottawa contributes to the denationalization of Québec cinema. It is essential that Québec reverse this situation while it is still possible. They have all the studies they need to act. No excuse is any longer acceptable."

Over the weekend more and more film makers joined in and interest spread. In Québec no one has to explain this sort of situation. Everyone immediately understands. It is just another battle in the struggle for Québec. And it is fun. Actors, actresses, writers and technicians piled in wanting to help. Beer and wine flowed, poster sized cartoons shot up all over the censorship offices attacking the government, endless photographs were taken, a restaurant patronised by film makers sent in a free meal, a photographic exhibition was mounted, an internal sheriff was appointed to keep law and order and an easy laughter-filled camaraderie prevailed. Everyone seemed to know everyone and soon the drab civil service offices began to feel like the weird home of some monstrous happy family. The idea that the police might burst in at any moment and drag us away diminished.

Monday morning André Guérin peeked in to find his office locked and guarded by a polite but firm group of film makers and the "study days" turned into a true occupation. As a bonus, the occupied offices contained endless reports on cinema in Québec and a couple of erratic copying machines. Far from having nothing to do, everyone was kept busy organising, running around, telephoning, being interviewed, planning and dealing with the mounting wave of sympathy and support.

The Association des Producteurs de Film du Québec, (producers), the Syndicat National du Cinéma, (the technicians' union), the Union des Artistes, (the actors' union), the Association of Quebec Film Critics, the S.G.C.T.-O.N.F. section, (the NFB film makers' and technicians' union), and the Atelier d'Animation Photographique fired off telegrams of support and made themselves available to help.

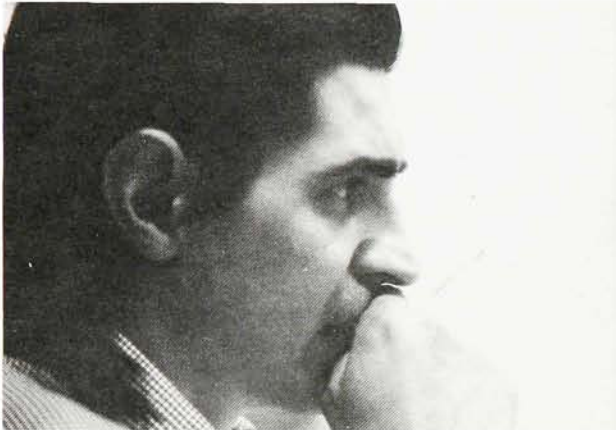
On Tuesday November 26th the report of the now defunct federal advisory committee on film found its way into the Québec press. This added urgency to the sense that Ottawa was on the verge of overtaking Québec with new legislation. Fat chance.

And while this new possibility was being discussed, it was becoming apparent that the sit-in was having some effect on the distributors. As voice after angry voice (almost always in English) called in wanting to know how they could get a release visa for their films, they were answered with "Bureau de surveillance occupé" and then told to "Téléphonez à M. Hardy." Few of the distributors seemed to know that Hardy was the Minister of Cultural Affairs, the man in charge of film in Québec. This eloquent comment on the failure of the Québec government to properly fulfill its cultural role was not lost on the film makers. Hardy may have been unknown to the people who make money by dumping foreign films in Québec then, but this is certainly no longer the case today.

With the weekly flow of films for release reduced to zero, the symbolic value of holding the censorship office was fast becoming economic. The Minister announced that he would not, after all, reveal the date that the film bill would be tabled. The next day, while being questioned in the National Assembly by the leader of the Parti Québécois opposition, Hardy said that "the sit-in does not bother me personally", that he "would never agree to meet with the film makers while threatened with the blackmail of the sit-in", (the film makers had not asked to see him since the beginning of the sit-in), and that "we cannot allow this sit-in to disrupt normal film distribution

or the normal functioning of the cinemas.” He also announced that his department was already doing the final editing of the text of the film bill – an abrupt improvement over the earlier dates bandied about which had fallen somewhere in the spring of 1975. It was hard not to think that the sit-in was having some effect, contrary to what was being said in Québec City.

The same day, Wednesday November 27th, the A.R.F.Q. fired off a long declaration on how the film law should read. It also accused the minister of defending American interests. “These are the same interests which



have prevented every minister of cultural affairs for 12 years from taking action. Who profits from the Québec government's inactivity? The American distribution companies who control the distribution of films in Québec and who engage in an incredible dumping in this sector. And the federal powers who have profited by this provincial inactivity to occupy the film field in Québec”. This declaration also pointed out that six months of letters and telegrams to Hardy prior to the sit-in had produced no response. With the declaration was an analysis of the oligopolistic activities of the “majors” in Québec with particular emphasis on the control exercised by Famous Players. This analysis showed how very little of the box office dollar could ever reach a Québec producer, even if he had a very successful film, and it showed how most of this same box office dollar ends up in the U.S. as profits. Needless to say very, very little of these profits are re-invested in Québec films. The analysis also showed that only 63 percent of films put into distribution in Québec were accessible to the unilingual francophone Québécois. And finally that only 40 of the 1000 films distributed in Québec in 1972 were Québec films.

Throughout all this, telegrams of support continued to pour in, many from groups or people outside the film world. Everyone jumped on the bandwagon, eager to defend Québec culture, to take a swipe at the feeble showing of the Québec government in cultural affairs and to bring out their own grievances. Amongst the more prominent supporters were the Institut Canadien d'Éducation des Adultes (ICEA), the St. Jean-Baptiste Society of Montreal and the teachers union, the C.E.Q.

On the 29th the heads of all the federal film agencies met with the Secretary of State. This again gave rise to the



impression that Ottawa was about to bring in legislation before Québec but Tadros of *Le Jour* pointed out that “Faulkner (the Secretary of State) does not seem to have a precise idea of what the federal film policy would be”.

Interest in the federal front was distracted by the announcement of a festival of Québec films in Haiti. This was promptly denounced by the film makers involved who knew nothing of this festival, let alone that their films were being shown there, and who considered it an example of Québec employing the same cultural colonising tactics in Haiti that the Americans employ in Québec. And this with a government way to the right of Claude Wagner.

At about this time exhaustion was setting in and spirits were low. Encouragement came from an unexpected quarter: English Canada. The Council of Canadian Film Makers sent a telegram supporting the aims and actions of the A.R.F.Q. and the Montreal branch of ACTRA followed suit.

Just over a year earlier, the A.R.F.Q. had brought the Canadian Film Awards to a grinding halt for many of the same reasons which had led to the sit-in. In 1973 the action of the Québec film makers had caused a lot of anger in English Canada and there had been a lot of misunderstandings. This time around, partly because the target of the protest was the Québec government, and partly because the English film makers better understood what was going on and why, the film makers of English Canada were able to line up with their French speaking colleagues as did a number of British and European film makers who saw the Québec film situation as being similar to their own.

By now the support of the other Québec film groups was turning into something more visible. The S.N.C., under the presidency of Michel Brault, began putting together a short film, using the stars of U.D.A., to explain the whole situation to the public. And these two unions, along with the SGCT-ONF, demonstrated outside the major American theatres, distributing leaflets. For the most part, the response of the surprised film goers was sympathetic, especially when Québec luminaries such as

Denise Filiatrault, Carole Laure, or Michèle Magny showed up with directors such as Gilles Carle or Jacques Gagné.

A delicate problem throughout had been the Fédération Québécoise de l'Industrie Cinématographique de Québec. The fragility of the meetings of the federation stemmed from the fact that amongst the members were distributors and exhibitors, the majors themselves. In spite of this, it seems that a way was found to send telegrams to Bourassa urging that he do something – and soon.

André Guérin was instructed to negotiate with the film makers by Hardy. This gave a lift to the by now tired regulars at the sit-in. It was seen as a sign that maybe the government would give in. After eleven days of round-the-clock vigilance, constant work, self-imposed unemployment and absence from friends and family, anything hopeful was seized upon. And then Choquette, the Québec minister of justice, sent in the Québec Provincial Police in the middle of a heavy snow storm. The police asked the film makers to leave. They refused. The police then cut off the lights and water and announced a half hour period of grace. Then at 10:20 p.m., the film makers were carried out one by one to shouts of "Les Ordres! Les Ordres!", the title of Michel Brault's feature about the police and the October Crisis of 1970. Dumped in the snow-covered sidewalk the film makers, actors, actresses and technicians vowed that although the sit-in was over the efforts to get a film law were not.

A new headquarters (rented this time) was set up immediately at the Iroquois hotel where the original general assembly was meant to have taken place. At a press conference on Wednesday December 4th, the following communiqué was given out reiterating the position of the four groups who signed the communiqué:

"The SNC, the SGCT-ONF, and the UDA are solidly engaged in the combat undertaken by the A.R.F.Q. aimed at obtaining the immediate tabling of the film bill and the holding of a public parliamentary commission.

The four organizations intend to show that the government of Québec not only did not respect its promise to the people of Québec of cultural sovereignty, but also that it betrayed them to Ottawa and to American

financial interests; that it betrayed their fundamental right to see films in French since 55 percent of films seen in Québec are in English; that it betrayed them by grabbing 3.59 million dollars a year in amusement taxes without reinvesting any of this money in a Québec film industry; that it betrayed them by allowing the flight of immense amounts of capital across our border or into sectors other than cinema; that it betrayed them by leaving 80 percent of all Québec film workers unemployed, workers whose films have shown and still show to the rest of the world the original and specific character of Québec and the Québécois, workers whose cinema with our songs, our theatre, our music, our literature, our sculpture, our poetry and our painting has done more for the evolution of Québec and Québécois than liberal politics practiced at the beck and call of Ottawa and Washington; that it betrayed them in their deepest most human being, their CULTURE, by naming one minister of cultural affairs after another, each more incompetent than the others, whose genius is never to know the dossiers which concern them.

This is why, after twelve years of peaceful negotiations and "good will" we are no longer satisfied with promises. We demand acts. We demand proof.

This is why we demand the immediate tabling in the house of the film law and the holding of a public parliamentary commission.

Only a film law can re-establish the fundamental rights of the Québec spectator, of the Québec taxpayer, of the Québec film worker. Only a film law can put an end to the daily rape of our national riches, cultural and otherwise, by American interests.

And only a public parliamentary commission can guarantee everyone's right to express his rights and to destroy forever the political and financial privileges from which some profit at the expense of others.

This basic film law would have to protect the film profession on the one hand from government control and on the other from the uncontrolled distribution of foreign films."

A.R.F.Q., S.N.C., U.D.A., S.G.C.T.-O.N.F.



The struggle would continue and the goal of having the film bill tabled by December 23rd was set because it had been calculated that if there were to be time to hold a public parliamentary commission the bill would have to be tabled before Christmas. In spite of the police eviction the film makers felt that something had been accomplished. As the president of the A.R.F.Q., Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, pointed out, "In 12 days of so-called illegal sit-in, the film dossier has made more progress with the government and the public than in 12 years of normal representations through normal channels."

On facing page:

1. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, A.R.F.Q.
2. Susan Gibbard, S.G.C.T.
3. Michel Brault, S.N.C.

"It is as if all at once the only force able to bring about the progress of a dossier with the government is an illegal force., it is as if thanks to our illegal act we are now able to gain the ear of the minister concerned."

Explaining both the sit-in and the eviction, Roger Frappier said; "Since we are affecting the true interests in Québec, that is to say the "majors", no further negotiation is possible, legal or illegal".

"I wonder how a government which waited until we affected the "majors" before evicting us from the censorship office will be able to come out of all this and present a law which will reflect the interests of the profession rather than foreign interests?"

Three more days of study at the Iroquois were organized and workshops were set up to figure out what to do next. Meanwhile the publishers were following the film makers in complaining to the government about their very similar problems. One of the workshops came up with figures which showed that after the Americans themselves, Canadians are the biggest consumers of American films and the citizens from whom the American film companies take the largest profits per capita. So "one understands why the 'majors' are opposed to film legislation, not only in Québec but also in Canada."

At the NFB the executive of the SGCT-ONF called a general assembly of their union to explain their support of the sit-in and to urge their members to participate in any future actions. This meeting was very important because the SGCT-ONF was the only union involved with a large anglophone membership, and there was the possibility that some members might view the sit-in and aims of the ARFQ as unfriendly to english Canadians. In the hope of avoiding this the following document was presented to the general membership of the SGCT-ONF. It is included here because it is addressed primarily to the English Canadian reader and because, although it repeats much of what has been covered above, it provides another way of looking at the situation.

Syndicat Général du Cinéma et de la Télévision – Section N.F.B.
December 5, 1974

WHY ARE THE QUEBEC FILMMAKERS SITTING IN AT THE QUEBEC CENSOR BOARD? AND WHY DO THEY WANT QUEBEC TO PASS LEGISLATION ON A FILM POLICY?

And why should the union for the technical category at the National Film Board, the SGCT/ONF, be supporting the demands?

What is the law they are asking for?

They are asking for basic legislation that would allow discussion in parliament and in the public on the government's policy on the film industry in Québec. The legislation would also establish a Québec Film Centre, with funds to support film production, in order to further develop Québec cultural expression and to counterbalance the heavy cultural influence of foreign films. Extra bonuses would encourage quality in the films. In the present situation, only 3-4 percent of films shown in Québec are made in Québec, and 55 percent of the films shown are in English in their original versions.

The \$3 million a year collected in amusement tax in the theatres would provide a financial base for the centre.

They hope the law would also establish quotas for Québec films in public theatres, in the same manner the CRTC regulates Canadian content on radio and television. The Canadian music industry has vastly benefited from Canadian content regulations, and the film industry could also take on new growth with such support.

\$55 million in profits leave Québec movie theatres for the United States every year. It seems reasonable to seek ways of reinvesting some of those funds into Quebec film production.

In the legislation proposed by the filmmakers (Association des Réalisateurs de Films du Québec – A.R.F.Q.), jointly with nine other organizations involved with film in Québec (including the SGCT/ONF, see Appendix 1) the Québec Film Centre would be a "Crown" corporation administered by a board composed of 5 appointees of the government, 5 representatives elected by the Québec film industry, and headed by a president chosen by the government from a list proposed by the other members of the board. This would assure a certain autonomy, rather than tight political control.

Since the government may very well present legislation that would include a board entirely named by the government, the filmmakers are pressuring for a parliamentary committee to hold public hearings before final passage of the bill.

The sit-in is being organized by the A.R.F.Q., with support from delegates from the Syndicat National du Cinéma, the freelance film technicians union, the Union des Artistes, the actors union, and the SGCT/ONF. Telegrams of support have come from far and wide, within the film industry and also from the Institut Canadien de l'Éducation des Adultes and the Saint-Jean-Baptiste society, and the Corporation des Enseignants du Québec, the school teachers union. (For complete list see Appendix 2.)

The Last Twelve Years

Since 1962, Quebec governments, and the Ministers of Cultural Affairs, Bona Arsenault, Pierre Laporte, Yves Gabias, Jean-Noël Tremblay, Claire Kirkland-Casgrain, François Cloutier, Denis Hardy have received or developed some 17 briefs, studies, white papers and proposed legislation on the subject of film in Québec. These papers have been signed by people as varied as Marc Lalonde, Guy Viau, Guy Côté, Arthur Lamothe, Guy Beaulne, Pierre Laporte, Raymond-Marie Léger, and five have been signed by André Guérin, the director of the Québec Censor Board whose premises are now being occupied. Every future or former premier or minister of cultural affairs, either in or out of office, made grave statements about the urgency of government support for that vital organ of Québec culture, the film industry. But the promises have remained barren, and the filmmakers are fearful that a dynamic and autonomous Québec film industry may become asphyxiated without concrete support from the Québec government. For the moment all non-private support for Québec film comes from Ottawa – CFDC, NFB, or Canada Council. Since cultural affairs are constitutionally under provincial jurisdiction, the present situation does not make sense.

Why are the filmmakers occupying the Censor Board?

They feel it is the one place where the Québec government does something active about film. And it is a good pressure point. Since the Board was occupied Friday night, November 22, the employees of the Board have not been allowed to enter the premises, and the classification and "visas", or permits to show films in public theatres, have ceased to be given. The films presently within the Board are prevented from leaving the premises, nor can new films be presented for classification. This has brought to a halt any changes in the programming in the theatres in Québec, and is creating pressure on the distributors and theatre owners, which will hopefully become pressure on the Minister of Cultural Affairs to present the proposed legislation as soon as possible.

Why should the SGCT/ONF support this struggle?

Aside from the fact that many of our members are also members of the Association des Réalisateurs de Film du Québec, we have a responsibility, as a large and strong film union situated in Québec, to take an interest in the health and dynamism of the film industry in the place we live in.

Since the U.S. domination of film distribution in Canada is harmful to our own films, as well as to those made in private industry, any advances in strategies such as quota systems would serve as a precedent that would facilitate a quota system in other provinces and considerably brighten the distribution picture for Canadian film.

An actively supported Québec film industry would generate an even more dynamic and creative film community that would be a beneficial influence on the NFB.

Although the battles took a different form, both the NFB and the CBC were created initially by pressure on the government to fulfill a cultural need. We can do no less than to participate in this struggle.

How can the SGCT/ONF support this struggle?

The president of the SGCT/ONF, Susan Gibbard, informed of the occupation on Sunday, November 24, obtained a telephone vote to send a telegram to Hardy and Bourrassa in support of the A.R.F.Q.'s demands, by the other members of the executive, and the telegram was sent immediately. Three members of the executive also spent Sunday night at the Censor Board.

Monday, November 25, at a regular executive meeting, \$500 were voted to support the struggle, and sent to the A.R.F.Q.

Some 30 members of the SGCT have participated in the occupation at various times in the last week.

Anglophone members have been made welcome, and it is a rewarding experience to participate in the exchanges taking place among filmmakers during the course of this collective effort.

We also need to develop other methods of applying pressure on the Québec government to hasten the passage of legislation for a policy beneficial to film in Québec.

Appendix 1 – Annexe 1

LOI CADRE DU CINEMA

Synthèse du mémoire-conjoint présenté au Ministre des Affaires Culturelles en octobre 1971.

Ont participé à l'élaboration du mémoire:

Association Canadienne des Distributeurs Indépendants de Films d'Expression Française (ACDIF)

Association des Propriétaires de Cinémas du Québec Inc.

Association des Producteurs de Films Du Québec

Association Professionnelle des Cinéastes du Québec

Association Canadienne des Distributeurs de Films (Montreal Film Board)

Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs

Society of Filmmakers (section québécoise)

Syndicat Général du Cinéma et de la Télévision (Section ONF)

Syndicat National du Cinéma

Union des Artistes

Appendix 2 – Annexe 2

LISTE DES ASSOCIATIONS OU DES PERSONNES QUI NOUS APPUIENT

Télémontage inc.

A.P.F.Q. Association des producteurs de films du Québec

S.N.C. Syndicat national du cinéma

l'Union des artistes

Association québécoise des critiques du cinéma

Le conseil québécois pour la diffusion du cinéma

LADAP Les ateliers d'animation photographique du Québec

Serge Losique, directeur du conservatoire d'art cinématographique

Le syndicat des techniques de communications. Cegep de Jonquière

S.G.C.T. Syndicat général du cinéma et de la télévision (section O.N.F.)

L'Association des cinéastes amateurs du Québec

Les étudiants en cinéma de l'Université Laval

ASIFA L'association Internationale du film d'animation (ASIFA CANADA)

Société Saint-jean Baptiste de Montréal

UCEFA Institut canadien d'éducation des adultes

ACTRA (Mtl) Association of canadian television and radio artists

C.E.Q. Centrale des enseignants du Québec

A.T.E.M. Section cinéma de l'Atelier multidisciplinaire

Roger Racine, Ciné-film

La Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs du Québec

C.C.F.M. Council of Canadian Film Makers

Following discussion the film board union supported the actions of its executive and of the A.R.F.Q. without a single dissenting vote.

Friday December 6th gave the public its chance to join the film makers. A huge krieg-light-lit march down St. Catherine street was followed by speeches and a whole night of Québec cinema on television on channel 9. Several hundred (some say thousand) placard-carrying demonstrators walked slowly through the centre of Montréal, chanting, singing, and as always giving out pamphlets. The march stopped outside every American theatre on the way to explain what was going on and why to theatre patrons and myriads of Christmas shoppers. Outside Place des Arts it came to end with four brief speeches from representatives from the four key organisations. Although most dispersed to participate in the night of Québec film, or to watch it on television, it is rumoured that a number of the demonstrators sneaked back to one or other of the American theatres under attack and caught the last show of "The Taking of Pelham One Two Three" or whatever else was playing.

Most thought that that was the end of the public actions for 1974 but there was another final flurry before it all succumbed to Christmas. The artisans of Québec, who were having their annual Salon des Métiers d'Arts at Place Bonaventure donated a booth to the film makers as a gesture of solidarity. Cameras and editing equipment were set up and film makers manned the booth.

On Sunday December 8th, unaware that the film makers were at the Salon, the Minister of Cultural Affairs, Denis Hardy, came down to put his official stamp of approval on the financially uninteresting (from an industrial point of view) handicrafts. The film makers knew he was coming and Hardy found that he was to get to meet them after all. A heated encounter took place, well covered by the media. After fifteen minutes of attack and counter attack, Hardy left angrily saying, "Think what you like, I am going to continue to draw up the law which I think is best for Québec cinema." Since this last outburst of mutual confidence things have been quiet. December 23rd has rolled past without any film law being tabled. But several committees of film makers were hard at work over Christmas and new plans, new actions, are on the way.

Perhaps this time the Québec government will keep its promise. Perhaps if it does the rest of Canada will follow suit and at long last we will have useful film legislation and a solid film industry capable of making and distributing excellent films. Here's hoping, but *Variety* with its own special sense of the bon mot, with its own precise idea of how things work, was not too encouraging. They headlined a factual article on the sit-in with: "Directors' Sit-In Only Succeeds In Delaying Holiday Needs." For "holiday needs" read Santa's annual gift of millions of dollars from Canadian moviegoers to the American conglomerates. Dollars which will be used to make more American films which will, in turn, fill theatres here and the whole cycle will be repeated. Parties in power, some of whom are suspected by people with nasty minds of receiving some of those same profit dollars, may see it all as Catch-22. But there is an easy answer which has been used by every other "developed" country in the world – legislation.

Only legislation will stop this farce which has lasted for decades. Only legislation will make possible our own film industry. □

Robin Spry is a director at the National Film Board. His most recent film was the documentary film, "Action", concerning the October Crisis.

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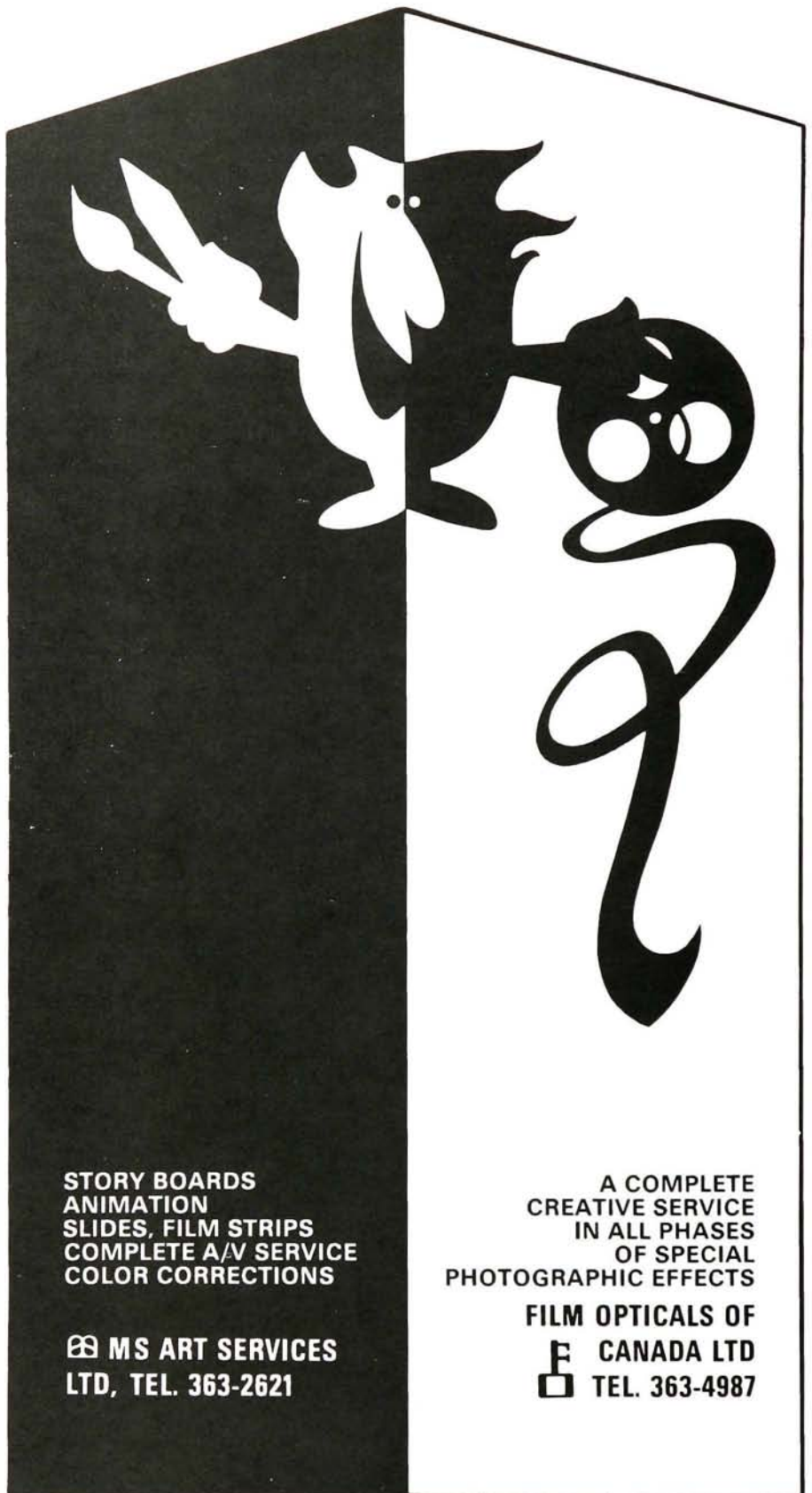
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