

LE CINÉMA QUÉBÉCOIS

THE SECOND ANNUAL CONGRESS OF THE "ASSOCIATION DES PRODUCTEURS DE FILMS DU QUÉBEC"

by *Connie Tadros*

Recently there have been two producers' meetings in Canada; one in Toronto where, according to the rumors we hear, people come in tuxedos to dinner, say grace before eating, and toast to the Queen. I'm going to report about the other one.

On the 13th and 14th of April, the Association des Producteurs de Films du Québec held their second annual Congress. The Congress turned out much as the first one had; more of an encounter session with people from every aspect of production here in Québec than a dignified, pat-you-on-the-back affair. Members, non-members, interested observers, the press, everyone was there. Certain critical information was given out, and many people told it as it was and will be, upsetting others, as is so often the case when the truth is finally out.

Dr. François Cloutier, Québec Minister of Cultural Affairs, opened the Congress with an address to the banquet on Friday night. He said, officially, that the Québec Cinematographic Center would indeed become reality shortly, before this present session of the National Assembly was over. Though not many details were given, he said several times that the Center would have a budget of \$3 to \$4 million yearly, renewable. He confirmed that the Center would be run by representatives of his Ministry, and by members of the private sector. Its purpose will be to encourage the production, distribution and exhibition of films which reflect the "character" of Québec, and to lend support to the technical industries. His speech raised more questions than it answered, but it confirmed, beyond a doubt, that the present Liberal government in Québec City was serious about the cinema—finally. This is a success, and comes after ten years of pressure from the industry, demanding that the provincial government do something to limit the chaotic conditions which the absence of adequate legislation had created.

After this announcement, the first round table, Saturday morning, made up of representatives of the provincial agencies, was quite calm. Sitting in front of the ninety some people gathered at the Congress was René Reeves, Assistant Director of Radio-Québec; Raymond-Marie Léger, Director of the Office du Film du Québec; Réal Michaud, Director of the General Service of Teaching Media, Ministry of Education; and Jean-Paul Dubreuil, an administrator from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. After a short introduction by each, the discussion was open to the floor.

There were some important revelations. Mr. Michaud admitted, not without difficulty, that it was true that the General Service of Teaching Media (the agency which approves all budgets for educational films before asking for bids on the contracts) had neglected to give out \$400,000 worth of contracts. The reason: bad planning. The consequences: next year's budgets will be reduced by \$400,000.

Mr. Reeves, from Radio-Québec, had an easier time than his boss had had the year before when it was announced that Radio-Québec was going to produce all the films for the Minister of Education. During the year, it has not been possible for this agency to produce everything itself, and in fact, it has given out 50% of its contracts to the private sector. It was true, Mr. Reeves said, that all of the contracts it gave out involved the films which required actors. For the last year and a half, Radio-Québec has been fighting its own little war against the Union des Artistes, a union which is presently being accused of being outrageously inflationary and dictatorial. Therefore, they have not used actors in their productions but have let the private industry fight it out.

This brought up the question of a Common Front against the Union, and Radio-Québec announced that they would be interested.

Not many questions were directed at Mr. Léger, probably because he was the best known person on the panel, and is generally accessible to the industry. As for Jean-Paul Dubreuil, he seemed to say that his Ministry would help the industry, though he was not specific.

The second round table involved the representatives of the federal govern-

ment. Mr. Jean Boucher, under-minister to the Secretary of State was in the audience. At the table were Mr. Gratien Gélinas and Mr. Michael Spencer from the Canadian Film Development Corp.; Mr. Robert Desjardins, Director of the Film Division of the Secretary of State; Mr. Raymond David, Director of the French network of the CBC; and Mr. André Lamy, Assistant Commissioner of the National Film Board of Canada.

Mr. Lamy came in for his share of barbs. The producers here seem to be more and more resentful of the Board, and of the competition it presents. Mr. Lamy came armed with statistics, some of which were very interesting. Speaking of a survey which had just been completed about the origin of the educational films being used in Canada, he stated that 79% of these came from the USA and from France, that 13% were made at the NFB, and that only 8% were made by the private sector in Canada. Denying the accusation that the Board was competitive with private industry, he stated that during 1973, the NFB should pump \$1,000,000 into the Québec economy via contracts to the industry.

This didn't seem convincing to several producers, and some went back to the origins of the Film Board, suggesting that the proper role for it was to open up the way, and then to withdraw when the industry was ready to take over. Several times, the problem of a machine for the development of 16 mm color film came up. The NFB had just bought it and the lab men wanted the Board to get rid of it, or at least to limit its use since they can and have provided this service. They judge the Board's action in buying the developer as hostile. Lamy made it clear that he had no mandate to weaken the NFB, and that he would continue to make it the best and most adequate agency he could. And no, the developer would stay where it was.

Mr. Raymond David from Radio-Canada insisted that they were interested as usual in working with private industry, and that they had, in fact, shown almost all the québécois feature films which had been offered to them. The network is willing to advance money for production purposes. He admitted that the CBC and the NFB have a

"special arrangement" which permits him to pay more for a film made by the Board than for a film made in the private sector, but he seemed open to discussion, provided that one didn't insist on negotiating then and there.

The bomb was Mr. Boucher's comment from the floor, in answer to a question about financing feature films. By now, his response must have been repeated coast to coast. He said flatly that the system of tax evasion which had brought so many investors to the feature film industry was "parasitical" and shall be stopped forthwith by the Minister of Finance in Ottawa. There was a great deal of reaction from the floor, some producers saying that money would dry up within six months and that the feature film industry would die prematurely. There were some suggestions made, about permitting the investors to depreciate 100% in the first year, or having the right to first recuperation. It was also suggested that the CFDC could increase its investments from a maximum of 50% to, perhaps, 75%, or that the \$200,000 ceiling could be raised (which, seemingly, it has been recently). The disarray was fairly general, but the emergency meetings which were suggested on the spot gave way to a suggestion that the new Executive Committee handle this problem as a priority.

As was the case with Mr. Léger earlier, the producers seemed to have fewer questions for Messrs. Gélinas and Spencer, probably because they are the best known and most accessible of the participants and see the feature producers quite regularly.

The weekend ended after another dinner, and an after-dinner speech by Mr. Boucher. Again, Mr. Boucher managed to get people's backs up, this time by calling the industry in Québec "primitive". There was a loud reaction, and much gnashing of teeth. No one seemed to remember that earlier on, those same producers who were now so defensive had insisted that the industry would disappear if those tax loopholes were closed. And so it goes.

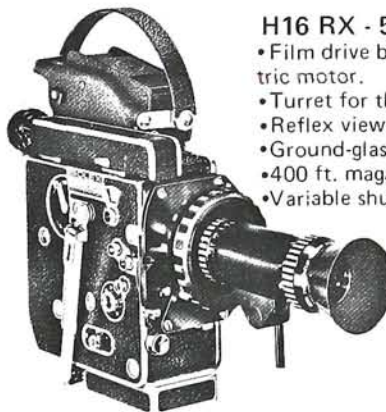
After the Congress, the air has been cleared. Men of the industry and men from the governmental agencies have "had it out", so to speak, and many issues have been clarified. The time has come, perhaps, for some more substantial work, now that everyone's had his say.

At the general meeting the new officers were elected and are as follows:

Claude Héroux — President (Cinévidéo); Claude Godbout — Vice President (Productions Prisma); André Collette — Secretary-treas. (Bellevue-Pathé); René Avon — Director (Projex); Robert Boivin — Director (Onyx Films); Mel Hoppenheim — Director (Cinévision); Arthur Lamothe — Director (Les Ateliers Audio-Visuels du Québec). ●



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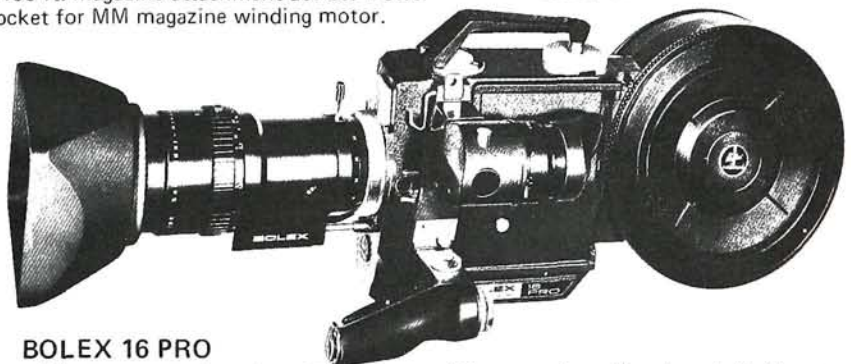
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