

Random cross-country sample of opinions on film & video policy

Robert Lantos,
RSL Entertainment Corp.,
Toronto:

"Overall, I feel it's a very positive step, long overdue and one which will stimulate growth of the film industry and create an environment of stability which has not existed until now in Canada. The redefinition of the National Film Board role is equally overdue and reflects the reality of what the NFB should be. It stresses the importance of the private sector, the leader both creatively and industrially in the film and television industry; it's healthy and reflects reality. However, it stops short of where it should go in terms of protective legislation in the form of a taxation system on foreign films distributed by foreign distributors in Canada. There may be a concentration of so much money and power in the hands of Telefilm Canada that creates the possibility of a giant monster in the future. There must be constant checks and balances established so as to keep Telefilm in tune with the private sector."

René Malo, Les Films René Malo, Montreal:

"The policy? It's crazy, it's Kafkaesque. There are excellent chances that the policy will simply be reversed because no government can live with it. The entire milieu is against it. I'm talking, of course, about the distribution policy. But there's nothing else in the policy. What else is there? It's completely superficial. It only repeats what everyone has been saying for the last five years. It supposedly injects \$7.5 million, but when you analyse it, there's only \$1.5 million for distribution, and \$1 million for script development. All the rest goes toward making Telefilm even

To sample national reaction throughout the industry to the National Film and Video Policy, released late in May by then-Communications minister Francis Fox, Cinema Canada randomly called producers, exhibitors, distribu-

tors and filmmakers in the country's four principal production centres: Montreal, Toronto, Edmonton and Vancouver. Asked to rate the Policy on a scale from 1-10, respondents averaged a favorable rate of 3.9.

larger - it's already becoming a huge monster - and Telefilm wants to become even more and more important. We're going toward a system where production in Canada is going to be a production for the television, and the producers are going to be in the service of the CBC and Telefilm. And, curious coincidence, both organizations are run by just about by the same person since André Lamy was given his post by Pierre Juneau who is his brother-in-law, and who controls him completely. It's really a 'gam-mick', and I think it's deplorable that the producers don't understand things more clearly. Especially since the policy just burys the entire film industry. It only addresses itself to the television industry. It's completely idiotic. The Australians have refused to sign a co-production treaty agreement with Canada, saying that the Canadian conception was erroneous.

"If I have to judge the policy on a scale from 10 to 1, it's zero. There's just nothing in it. No, there's \$1 million for scripts, so I'll give it a one."

Tom Shandel, Jericho Films Ltd., Vancouver:

"You know for those of us on the Coast, or in the provincial enclaves like the Montreal English, who are, I imagine more or less in the same boat, I think the policy is quite progressive and it's a step in the right direction and it's a bigger step I think than I've ever seen

before in my working lifetime which is about 15 years in this business now. I like Fox actually. One of the things I've said what superceded this in my view is the fact that he's out in the cold since Turner's been in. And this, I find shocking because I thought that the move for the kind of cultural components of this film business staying in the Department of Communication has actually been basically salutary for those of us in the industry.

"Fox understood in a traditional liberal small 'l' liberal sense and big 'L' liberal sense in terms of Canada that there are certain costs to independent culture and that, regardless of what these costs are, there are certain basic minimum threshold that we were prepared to stand for and fight on. One of these would be something like a minimum number of Canadian films being produced yearly even if the argument couldn't be made that they'd be self-supporting. Or else we'd be absorbed in the American culture. And I would look at the policy with that kind of attitude that goes back to 1929 and the Aird Commission which really called for the establishment of the CBC for exactly the same reason that if we had left it to a kind of Tory thinking, we'd just be absorbed in the United States.

"Considering the NFB is a very important employer in our area, only a small core staff that hires exclusively freelancers in terms of directors, anything that disbands the Côte-de-Liesse facility and gets rid of the lab there and puts production money into the regions, is I think a very futuristic move. It even pleases the kind of right-wing, free-market types that exist out here. So I think that getting away from the idea of a kind of institutionalization of Canada, of centralization which prevailed in the Film Board and still prevails in the CBC of course, the further we get away from that, I would say that I support this attitude.

The fact that it's the deinstitutionalizing, kind of getting away from the monolithic structures - the staff, kind of civil servants and bureaucrats and the other things - giving the sponsored programs out to the private sector, that makes sense. Those that want to make sponsored films constitute a certain part of the film industry. "I recognize that there is a number of priorities in the

agendas that work here - I'm just looking for a middle ground to help people like me survive. And I see myself as part of the public sector of the film industry - that is, I can be non-commercial. From instinct and interest the kind of subjects I tend towards have to be supported by government because no one else would. So, when I look from BC - we have a very reactionary government out here - only the Federal government offers us the opportunity for some enlightenment now, but I think Fox was a very intelligent from what I can tell. A lot of the moves that the policy suggested means that he took a little distance and a kind of critical look at the Appleburt stuff which I thought was disastrous and stupid-minded actually.

"I just think it's a move, I thought it was a move towards bringing Canadian culture back into the front rank of the public consciousness that tended to be moved to the backburner for a few years and somebody like Fox could articulate those kinds of arguments. I had to rate the film policy from 1 to 10, I would give it, I think 6 or 7. But the issue whether the policy is 5, 6 or 7 or 3, 4, 5 is almost irrelevant because it's bound to be a victim of the election.

Millard Roth, Canadian Motion Picture Distributors Association, Toronto:

"I will restrict my comments to those aspects that relate to distribution and, more specifically, to our association. I'm pleased that there is the recognition in the policy of the existence of the association, and of the potential role which the members of the association might be able to play in terms of supporting some of the objectives that are articulated in the policy. Was the policy worth waiting for? I'm somewhat ambivalent in that area. There are some positive aspects of the statement, and there are some blanks to be filled in to answer the question of whether it's worth waiting for.

"Obviously, the policy is not going to impact on the industry nearly as extensively as the broadcast policy which introduced the Broadcast fund. The impact will be of a much longer term; some of the mechanisms and the objectives need a longer term to take hold."

Pierre René, France Film, Montreal:

"I haven't even read it so you see the kind of importance it has in my eyes. All I know is that I doesn't touch distribution; from what my colleagues have told me it does absolutely nothing for the independent distribution sector. And that's about it. Even if some have said that it kills the sector, I can't see how you can kill something that's already dead since as far as I know distribution in English Canada is almost dead.

"Anyway, for the moment, the policy doesn't affect me. It might have if the federal government had taken the decision to revitalize the independent distribution sector - and it's obvious that had Paramount or Fox product been available, we would have been in the race. As it is, we'll keep limping along, that's all.

"Finally, it's been three years now that Fox has done nothing about distribution. It's good that he even talks about it, but one can only conclude that it's a sector that wasn't worth touching. I've always found that strange because there is a distribution problem here at the governmental level, let's not kid ourselves. Cinema is after all not a major industry in Canada. Whether there is a Canadian cinema or not is not going to change the face of the Canadian economy even if you put the entire film industry together from exhibition to production, it does not represent an enormous activity. And distribution is a tiny fraction of this great hole - and the politicians are simply not prepared to undertake a great battle to save that sector. Or so it seems to me, despite everything that's been said in the past 30-40 years, nothing's ever been done. Politically it's just not worth it.

"So things'll go on pretty much as they've been. I don't really know what the great difficulty is since Fox is after all not the first minister to have ever tackled this dossier. But for all sorts of reasons it's they emit pious wishes, but when you look at it in practice two years later, nothing comes of it - distribution, nothing, exhibition, nothing also.

"If I look at the policy as a distributor, I'd give it a 1 - there's nothing there. As a citizen perhaps I'd give it 4 or 5, but then, as I said, I haven't read it."

Michael Spencer, Filmline Productions, Montreal:

"My general reactions were that the film policy was not a clear call for any particular thrust or action over another action. It covered the entire water-front,

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but... it's much too diffuse. "Since the government introduced the Broadcast Fund last July, its policy should be based on that concept. The thing to do is to push Canadian production in the direction in which it can be of some impact. The policy doesn't zero in on anything, and I don't think that that provides much leadership or excitement or whatever.

"Although the policy seems to reject the (Film Board) recommendations of the Applebaum-Hébert Commission, it doesn't really suggest any other policy. It defines no role for the Film Board. It simply says that the Board should be given five years to devise a policy for itself.

"When you come to the distribution thing, I think it's a pity that they didn't follow up on the Broadcast Policy. At least there they had given some direction, they said, 'Look. The future for the film industry in Canada is to produce for television because television is something we can control to some extent ourselves.' At least there is a policy...

"They could have put a lot more stress on the question of video-cassettes, for example. Video movies in video stores and all that. They could have said, 'That's an important area. We will come up with some special programs to assist Canadian producers to get their stuff marketed.' But they seem to be trying in every area, except in the case of theatrical distribution. There it appears that the main thrust of their idea is to tell Canadian producers, 'Try and get into Canada via the U.S.' I think they should be honest with Canadian distributors and say, 'Look you guys, your business is going down the tube. Why should we put any money into it?' But they didn't say that. On the one hand, they say, let's get Americans to distribute more Canadian films in Canada, and then they have these programs of support for marketing of Canadian productions but it remains to be seen if what they're going to be doing is assisting Americans.

"This (negotiation with the U.S. Majors for more Canadian films in theatres) is all being presented to us as if it has never happened before. But, in fact,

attempts have been made by various ministers to negotiate this kind of a deal, to my knowledge, in 1965, in 1972, probably in 1977. None of it has ever worked because the government of Canada has never taken a solid position up-front with legislation in place that they can use to convince the other side that they are really serious. And I don't have any hope that this will be any better than any of the other efforts.

"So on a scale from 1-10, I'd be tempted to give the policy a 5, but that sounds like I have no opinion. So I'll give it a 4."

George Christoff, Filmwest, Edmonton :

"We were hurt a great two years ago when the tax shelter was removed and people no longer had an investment incentive. Until then, we were doing quite well. There is nothing in the most recent policy which repairs the damage which has been done.

"The impetus is good. It's structurally valid with the future technology and all that. But it's too early to tell whether it's just going to be centered in the Montreal-Toronto-Ottawa

triangle again, or whether it's going to get here.

"The Film Board has always been good to us out here. The only people who complained about the Film Board were the lab people down East or the film brokers down East. The Film Board provides us with work over the rough periods - it's a very symbiotic relationship... The new measures won't have any effect ; it's just words."

Peter Simpson, Simcom Ltd., Toronto :

"I guess my impression is generally favorable. It seems to draw all the areas together. From watching the events over the years, there wasn't a single policy before. Now what they've done is amalgamated all the various policies into one cohesive body. I don't think they all necessarily fit that well together. It wasn't really thought out as one policy ; it's simply an amalgamation.

"The policy is weak in its attempts at marketing, in the distribution of Canadian film... Having quiet chats with the majors just doesn't work. Funding films is one thing, and making sure they have access to the screens in this country is another, and I don't think they've been realistic about insuring that that is going to happen.

"The fund is a good idea. There's no specific help for features. Pointing out the continued existence of the capital cost allowance is a bit of a joke because you couldn't get arrested selling cca's these days. It's nice that it's there, but having it on the statutes and having it function is a different thing. There will be positive aspects. For the first time they have acknowledged the distribution and marketing phase. They have acknowledged that there is help needed in that area. I think, however, that some experimentation by Canadian distributors on Canadian films with theatre chains will show the warts and perhaps lead to a more comprehensive policy which will be more realistic about getting the job done."

Andy Emilio, Citadel Distribution, Toronto :

"I think the policy is irrelevant to distribution. It is going to Americanize whatever Canadian production is done from here on in. It puts the control which people like myself had - the entrepreneurs - into the hands of the government and Telefilm Canada. Canadian distributors used to be involved, because we know the marketplace from the ground up - better than the producer at certain given times. Now the Majors are to handle the films, not only in the States but in Canada. Aside from putting us down in our own country, we don't have a chance to extend outside of the country either.

"The film policy wasn't worth waiting for. It doesn't solve any problems. It will affect the industry adversely. The Canadian part of the film industry up here is still a small part of the whole. Most of the films, that are seen here are American. Taking all facets of the industry - producers, directors, actors, writers, distributors - the policy is still going to lead the good Canadian people out of Canada because the Americans will learn to cultivate people up here and bring them down. It's not going to improve the industry in any way."

Allen Stein, Filmwest, Edmonton :

"I think almost everybody in the private film industry applauds the spirit of the film policy, and I join with them. But there are quite a few things which alarm me about it. The main thing is that - I don't want to set this up as an West vs. East thing, or the Hinterland against the Metropolis - but those of us in the 'regions' are at a disadvantage no matter how open and warm and sensitive the people in the central institutions are to us, because of the centralization of these very institutions. Just to make the phone calls and the trips to Toronto, we're at a huge financial disadvantage because that's an expensive and time-consuming proposition. And we're not part of the gossip mill and the socializing that goes on in Toronto so, just for starters, we're at a disadvantage and the film policy does not address that issue at all. The word 'regional' only crops up once in the film policy, and only with reference to the Film Board part of the policy. So what scares me is that there are no directives in the policy to govern the basic principles by which Telefilm will operate vis à vis regional parity and regional development. In fact, its developmental role is very subject to question because Telefilm, in the past, has shown itself to be more interested in the Hollywood orientation. The problem is that a few people or even one person has a lot of discretionary power. Without guidelines that would satisfy people here, it's a little bit scary. With all its money, Telefilm doesn't seem to be very oriented toward the first-time producer, or the producer who is outside of the standard clique.

"Most people are pretty sceptical about the distribution part. It seems to me that the problem is so much more fundamental than just quotas or voluntary quotas or whatever they try to do. It's a whole cultural kind of thing, and it's so deep and it's so broad that to try to attack this problem without trying to kindle the whole national imagination, which is really what it's all about... It

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can't hurt but it follows the Hollywood model, and Telefilm's into that. There isn't a word about Australia, or about an industry which can grow up with a cultural identity as well as being viable financially and artistically."

André Link, Cinépix, Montreal

"Generally, I think it's a step in the right direction, with one extremely disturbing factor which concerns distribution. I think that, in so far as distribution is concerned, the policy is short-sighted, erroneous, ignorant and devastating. It should be changed. As it stands, it's an absolute negation of what has been said and done for the past ten years and more. You still have to show me a country in which there is indigenous production without national distributors. If Canada is to be the new model, well, I'd like to see that."

Jack Darcus, Exile Film Productions, Vancouver:

"I'm impressed with what they are talking about. The main problem is the elections. I'm worried about the removal of Francis Fox and I'm not sure that was the best thing to do in the middle of the process. The election is going to matter very much for the filmmakers because the implementation of the policy is, I expect, going to be questionable."

"The most promising part of the policy is that something is going to be done about distribution of Canadian films in Canadian theatres. The surface thrust is that a lot of money is going to be distributed to people in the industry but behind it is the idea of a fair system in Canada for Canadian films and Canadian theatres. All the details of the thing sound very positive."

"I think that what's happened in the past is that a 'good will' system has been put into place. And that was eroded and never brought into practice. My understanding, from the film policy meetings we've had out here, is that they will explore ways to bring pressure upon

the Americans to do something about this. I'm not interested in good will myself because I just don't believe it works, but after a six-month period of evaluation, they will talk about such things as tax levies, quotas and all that. I think the idea that the Americans will somehow run more Canadian films in America might add up to a little more than tokenism. The problem to be addressed is that all the money leaves the country every year without any of it resting here, doing what it should for us as it does in other countries."

Jim Westwell, Televectra Film Development Inc., Vancouver:

"We don't have a particular great need right now to read it but I guess that it just doesn't affect me immediately at this moment. I guess that's why I haven't bothered to pick up and run with it. But inevitably it certainly will effect me down the line and how, I don't know yet before I read it. But no, I've been working on a Hollywood picture and it's going on and on and that just keeps me busy."

Victor Loewy, Vivafilms, Montreal:

"There's not a single word of new facts, new suggestions, new ideas. They are simply rehashing the same paper I've seen for the last six years. Basically, what I see is that they have hired more people, and they came up with the same policies. They watered down everything vis à vis the Majors, they left the field totally open to them, and we're extremely unhappy with them."

"I'm falling back to my old position. I don't give a shit one way or the other what the government does because they're not helping us. I'm going to suggest to my organization (of distributors) that we should stop operating with them in any way and treat them as if they don't exist. They have never, never done anything we told them to do. We submitted a very specific paper about pay-TV which they have never followed. We have submitted suggestions on the video policy. It hasn't been

followed, and everything is, once again, controlled by the Majors.

"I was totally and completely surprised by the policy. I would never believe that Francis Fox would sell out to such an extent. It's a joke. What are their conclusions? I've seen that they are going to go to the Majors to beg them to agree to take money from Telefilm to launch Canadian films. That's all. Basically, I thought that the policy was going to give Telefilm Canada something to do. Before, 80% of the money given to them was used up to pay the salaries. Now they're just hiring more incompetent people. But what are they doing? I've asked Lamy now for years, I want to know what they're doing, what they've done since Lamy took over. I never had any beef before, but since Lamy took over, there's been nothing. I'm deeply dissatisfied, so much so that in my case it's going to influence the way I'm going to vote."

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MONTREAL - Since the Société générale du cinéma became Quebec's principal film-financing agency Feb. 20, it has allocated over \$2 million of public money to 75 private-sector projects.

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