

## Subsidizing racism?

(The following exchange was brought to the attention of Cinema Canada.)

Mr. Ed. Prevost  
Chairman  
TELEFILM CANADA  
National Bank Tower  
600 LaGauchetière St., west  
Montreal, Quebec  
H3B 4L2

Dear Sir,

It is with great discontent and overdue outrage that we forward this letter of protest. As Arab Canadians, it is disheartening to learn that a branch of the Canadian government is helping to subsidize the production of anti-Arab propaganda films. Canadian producers Robert Lantos and Stephen J. Roth have purchased the rights, along with International Cinema Corporation, to George Jonas' *Vengeance*, a book which purports to be true account of how Israel's top antiterrorist team avenged the 1972 PLO massacre of 11 Israeli athletes at the Munich's Olympics. Though the legitimacy of *Vengeance* is in question (*New York Times* reviewer Ken Follett admitted that "the best bits are impossible to check"), Mr. Lantos has publicly admitted that he didn't care whether the book was true or not, only that it was full of action. We have no objections towards the making of the film; a producer can make whatever film he/she pleases. We only believe that a propaganda film which is blatantly anti-Arab in nature and context should not

be, for whatever reason, funded and endorsed by the Canadian government.

Lantos and Roth have been extremely active in our country's motion picture industry. Yet, they have maintained a history of government-subsidized films that, one way or another, promoted hatred toward Arab Canadians: *Your Ticket Is No Longer Valid* features actor George Peppard as an Arab-hating executive who refers to Arabs as "Towelheads" and "Green slime." *Paradise*, another Lantos/Roth production also aided by the CFDC, is about a Western boy and girl who are chased across the desert by a horde of savage Arabs who lust for the girl's body. In a humiliating scene, a monkey is able to scare away a pack of those Arabs by throwing coconuts at them from up in a tree. In the movie, all the Arabs are portrayed as cruel and ruthless—except for one who, naturally, is killed by his fellow Arabs.

Reiterating what was said earlier, it is quite obvious Lantos and Roth have been taking advantage of our tax dollars to articulate their personal prejudices. We hope that in the case of *Vengeance* and future films, Telefilm Canada will exercise renewed discretion when funding decisions are made. It is bad enough that our media is filled with racism against a number of ethnic groups, but is extremely unnerving to find our government endorsing it.

**Le Centre de recherche et d'études arabes; Arab American University Graduates; Arab Anti-Discremination Committee; Centre d'études arabes pour le développement, Montreal.**

Mr. Ed. Provost  
Chairman  
TELEFILM CANADA

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter dated Feb. 18, 1985 regarding Telefilm's position on the *Vengeance* project. We especially appreciate your clarification of Telefilm Canada's prime concern as being "to assist in the creation of quality dramatic projects which will appeal to Canadian audiences." It is this worthy doctrine to which we will curtail our comments.

Is it presumptuous to presume that by 'quality' you are implying that inherent integrity and honesty is required of Telefilm Canada projects, as well as a measure of filmmaking expertise? Of course not. An essential element of both art and self-respect is the adherence to substance as well as form.

It is our conviction that *Vengeance* is sorely lacking integrity and honesty, and boldly contravenes your "non-racist or sexist" themes policy. The film is racist in both its content and what it chooses to ignore. It ignores the persecution and slaughter of Palestinians, and scores of Israeli human-rights abuses that continue to this day (verified by a series of condemning UN resolutions), i.e., the background to the setting. And rather than presenting any Arab women, children or lovers, who bleed, have emotions or in other ways are slightly human, the only Arabs introduced are the Munich killers. Would you not agree that the movie makes its point out of context? The gory, portrayal of the murders 'sans raison' has the uninformed movie-goer legitimize the equally bloody revenge and eagerly seek it through the rest of the story.

This is quality?  
While in no way condoning the killing

of innocent Israeli civilians, we do deplore the sleazy tactics this film uses to promote racist propaganda. It seeks to and successfully promotes the mystical, biased stereotype of the bloodthirsty, inhuman Arab savage running amok in the modern world.

As mentioned in our first letter, in a point we suspect was not made clear enough, we are not protesting the actual production of this film. God knows that the history of private filmmaking is pocked with racist films against blacks, Indians, Japanese and, most recently, Arabs. It is Telefilm Canada's participation in the project to which we strongly object.

This is not the first time Robert Lantos and Stephen J. Roth have used tax-free dollars and Canadian government support to articulate their personal prejudices (tax shelter numbers 172 and 267 were provided for the films *Your Ticket Is No Longer Valid*, retitled *The Finishing Touch*, and *Paradise*). Your link to *Vengeance* means, in effect, that the Canadian government agrees with the film's blatant biases. Need we remind you that the Canadian Charter of Rights protects ethnic groups and individuals from such abuses?

We will appreciate your thoughtful response to our comments.

Sincerely,

**Arab Research and Studies Center,  
Montreal**

*The Canadian Film Development Corp. did advance an interim loan to the producers for Your Ticket Is No Longer Valid. There was no CFDC involvement in Paradise. — Ed.*

## A cynical view

If someone had wanted to make, say, *Prizzi's Honor* in Canada, this is probably how it would have gone.

Telefilm would not approve the script, or, if it did, would have said it needs work, assigned it to a reader who would have ended up suggesting the removal of the sex and violence.

The CBC, upon showing interest, would have ordered the excision of the ethnic references.

ACTRA would have insisted upon replacing Jack Nicholson and Kathleen Turner with Lawrence Dane and Kim Cattrall.

After CTV and CBC had finally passed, the project would go to Global, who would also pass because they currently favour series.

Private Canadian sources would decline investment because, while it isn't impossible to work with government, the latter are nonetheless motivated by political and geographical considerations and not by the fine, fat, commercial greed of the real world.

The Canadian distributors (read American distributors in Mountie costumes) would have scheduled the film to open in North Bay and New Westminster at 8 a.m. on July 4 and then complained that Canadian films don't make money.

Canadian critics would have subjected the movie to withering attack, except for Marshall Delaney of *Saturday Night*, who would have found in it many small excellences but, overall, wanting in the artistic stature appropriate to projects funded even in part by taxpayers' money.

Meanwhile, Canadian audiences would have yawned.

If, however, word of the film's success abroad had filtered back to Canada,

neither its writer nor director would ever again get work here.

Now, I admit this is a cynical view.

The only point to the exercise is to make us ask ourselves who really wants a film industry here anyway?

**Norman Klenman  
Vancouver, BC**

## Award time-based

I am an experimental filmmaker. My latest film will premiere at the Festival of Festivals. I won an award of \$300 worth of lab services from Sonolab at the Atlantic Film Festival (October '82), and now they refuse to honour it.

To be precise they say, after eight L.D. phone calls, many "hold please's," four weeks of delays, much questioning of me as to "what kind of a film did I think I could make for \$300 and where was I going to get the rest of the money?" and statements like they hadn't intended this award for the shooting of "birthday parties" and they expected the *student* who received this award to continue to use their lab, and they expected the award to be used the same year. No stipulations or limitations were stated on the award itself or in the accompanying letter. Now they tell me that they will only honour the award if I guarantee to complete the film with their lab. (A safe 'if' on their part as I had already pointed out that, unlike when I lived in New Brunswick and had to mail to one lab or another, I was now residing in Toronto and the risk, time and expense of mailing to Montreal was not reasonable.)

I also pointed out that there are no guaranteed financial benefits from giving an award; that a certain amount of PR had already accrued to them through the Festival's press, brochure and awards ceremony; that I might in future use their lab. But NO, a definite "not interested in PR," give us your money now or no award. So, another small, independent, struggling, experimental filmmaker shafted by the Big Co.?

What can be done about this?

**Barbara Sternberg  
Toronto**

*Apparently not very much. Sonolab vice-president Dov Zimmer confirmed that all Sonolab awards are only valid for the year in which the award was given. — Ed.*

## Allegro rectifies

I am writing in reference to the recent (July-August) *Cinema Canada* article "Blue Line sales promising for Allegro," in which there were a few factual errors.

For the record, I would like to clarify that the financial split for *Blue Line* was Les Productions de la Chouette Inc., 67%, National Film Board, 33%. Bill (not Rick) Merrill is Vice-President of Programming and Operations at CFCF, and finally, Les Productions de la Chouette is not a holding company of Allegro Films.

Sincerely,

**Tom Berry,  
president,  
Allegro Films Inc.  
Montreal**

Arab Research and Studies Center Inc.  
P.O. Box 237  
Youville Station  
Montreal, Quebec  
H2P 2V4

Gentlemen:

We have received your letter of January 21, 1985, and wish to make clear Telefilm Canada's position regarding the project *Vengeance*.

Telefilm Canada has been created to foster and promote the Canadian film and television industry. Our prime concern is to assist in the creation of quality dramatic projects, which will appeal to Canadian audiences.

*Vengeance*, a story written by a Canadian, is, as you point out, a hypothetical, perhaps semi-fictional thriller in many respects much like *The Day Of The Jackal*. It is our understanding that, while the book deals with recent political events, it does not have a pronounced anti-Arabic character. Indeed, the subject is terrorism on all sides of the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Telefilm Canada is not a producer and, therefore, does not exercise creative control over productions. However, the Corporation maintains a policy of not participating financially in films which have either racist or sexist themes. The *Vengeance* project is in the development stage at the moment and does not appear to be in contravention of this policy.

Regarding your comments on RSL, we must correct your assertion that the Corporation was investor in *Your Ticket Is No Longer Valid* and *Paradise*. Neither of these films had investment from the CFDC, as Telefilm Canada was then called.

Yours sincerely,

**Ed Prévost,  
Chairman,  
Telefilm Canada,  
Montreal**