

French-language market ready for specialty television

MONTREAL — The French-language television market in Quebec is ready for a new package of specialty and pay services, says the chief executive office of Premier Choice: TVEC Inc.

Radio-Canada has also indicated that time will tell whether there is sufficient subscriber demand for an all-news channel.

Hubert Harel told *Cinema Canada* that the introduction of five specialty channels on a "take one, take all" basis will increase the value of cable television in Quebec, increase market penetration and reduce the numbers of subscribers who discontinue cable services during the summer months.

"For the Quebec consumer, it will be a plus," says Harel. "He is assured of a cross-section of high-quality specialty programming."

During a four-week hearing last summer, the CRTC heard 21 applicants, received 1,884 interventions and considered 23 studies on the demand and impact of the proposed services.

The decision, announced Nov. 30, authorizes four new English-language channels on the basic service and one new discretionary channel. Cable companies are permitted to choose any combination of these five channels.

These specialty channels are: the CBC news and information service, Vision TV, YTV Canada, MeteoMedia: Weather Now and The Family Channel on the discretionary service.

In addition, the CRTC has authorized a transfer from discretionary to basic of The Sports Network (TSN) and MuchMusic.

Cable companies can also choose to offer four U.S. superstations and one U.S. pay-television network on the discretionary service.

Where a cable company chooses to carry all the new basic channels, the cost to subscribers will be between \$1.50 and \$2.00 per month above existing fees. The CRTC has justified this increase with various studies and surveys that, it says, indicates between 77 per cent and 82 per cent of close to 6.2 million cable subscribers in Canada are prepared to pay an increase of \$3.00 for new programming.

Bill Allen, spokesperson for the Canadian Cable Television Association with a membership of 538 cable carriers, says the CCTA board supports what it calls a "bold" and "far-reaching" licensing decision.

Not only will cable carriers and subscribers benefit from a "modest fee increase" and a wide range of programming choice, respectively. Allen says

program producers will also benefit directly from a portion of cable revenues diverted to Telefilm Canada's Broadcast Fund.

Although there may be some reluctance by smaller cable carriers in remote areas, where rates are higher and channel capacity is limited, the CCTA

board is confident that most cable systems will want to carry all recently licensed channels.

The French-language channels licensed for distribution on the basic service are: Le Canal Famille, Musique Plus, Le Réseau des Sports, TV5 and MétéoMédia:Météo-Instant.

Cable companies in French-

language markets with less than 6,000 subscribers must distribute all five specialty channels on the basic service or none at all. This decision, reports the CRTC, was made to "help the French-language services gain an initial foothold in francophone markets and develop as wide an audience as possi-

ble."

Harel, whose company is the broadcaster of Le Canal Famille, says the fact is this "take one, take all" approach is one way to avoid fragmentation of a small French-language audience.

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eventually see a lot of weak broadcasters," he says.

However, the CRTC has determined that on August 31, 1991, cable operators will be permitted to be more selective.

Says Harel, there is no doubt that the shift of MuchMusic and TSN from discretionary to basic will have a slight impact on the growth rate of pay-television in Quebec.

The CRTC has made clear its own position on the anticipated effect of these services on both

language markets, stating that the impact will be comparable to the introduction of one new conventional television station in each of these markets.

It is expected that the addition of these services or 45,000 additional hours of Canadian programming (including repeats) will reach no more than four per cent of the audience in each market. Over the next five years, (some licenses were issued on a three-year and others on a five-year renewal basis) the new services, according to the

conditions of their licenses, will generate along with initial investments close to \$325 million in the production, acquisition and development of Canadian programs.

The CRTC has also stated that there is a strong public demand for new programming choices and that it is necessary to meet this demand with Canadian programming before technological advances and increasing accessibility of U.S. specialty services make it more difficult.

Timing was the most critical

factor in a decision made by the CRTC not to withhold license approval until the federal minister of Communications had introduced legislation to the Broadcast Act.

Although broadcast legislation has not yet been introduced, Patricia Dumas, press secretary to Communications minister Flora MacDonald, told *Cinema Canada* that the minister sees no conflict between the CRTC licensing decision and the proposed intent of broadcast legislation.

"She is satisfied," says Dumas, "that in the decision, there is room to move on the establishment of her policy in terms of how to assure more and better Canadian dramatic programming."

Whether or not a French-language all-news channel will eventually be licensed will partially depend on the success of the recently licensed English-language all-news channel, the popularity of the new TV5 license on basic cable and the degree of audience fragmentation by the new programs, says Claire Samson, a communications officer at Radio-Canada.

The French-language arm of the CBC "welcomes" the invitation by the CRTC to submit an all-news feasibility report by December 1988, she says.

"It would be premature to say whether we are for or against an all-news channel before we have studied the situation," says Samson. "Radio-Canada has made submissions for a second channel but never as an all-news channel."



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Suntots for Cinar

MONTREAL - Cinar Films has entered into a co-production agreement with the Initial Groupe of Paris for a 26 half-hour animated television series.

Suntots and Smoggies, produced by Micheline Charest and Ron Weinberg of Cinar Films and Jean Cazes of the Initial Groupe, is expected to be ready for broadcast later this year.

Billed as an environmentally enlightened series focusing on environmental concerns, *Suntots and Smoggies* is alternative children's programming created to entertain and, at the same time, educate young viewers on the merits of ecological awareness.

Gerald Potterton is the director. His recent credits include Cinar's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* animated series.

Gregg to chair

TORONTO - Allen R. Gregg has been appointed chairman of the board of the Festival of Festivals in Toronto.

Gregg, who is chairman of Decima Research, succeeds Jon Slan who is president of Paragon Motion Pictures and who has moved to Los Angeles to head up his company's offices there.

Brendan Calder, president and director of Counsel Trust Company and a member of the executive committee of the festival replaces Gregg as second vice-chairman.

Caplan critical of CRTC specialty license decisions

TORONTO — Despite CRTC claims that Canadians will have access to more varied television services following its licensing of new specialty and pay-TV services, not everyone is convinced it will mark a major improvement in audience viewing prospects.

Gerald Caplan, co-author of the 1986 Federal Task Force on Broadcast Policy, said the approval of the new services will not improve the amount of Canadian drama, entertainment and variety on television.

"We are not going to get any of that. We are going to get weather and rock videos and sports, which is not exactly something that we are desperately lacking at the moment," he told *Cinema Canada*.

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) approved four English-language and five French-language basic cable services. The services range from an all-news network to a national weather service.

Also, the CRTC approved the transfer of MuchMusic and The Sports Network from pay-TV to basic cable. The federal broadcast regulator also licensed a new pay-TV service for youth and family viewers called The Family Channel.

CRTC chairman André Bureau, in a written statement announcing the new services, said that they will complement and diversify existing services, provide new outlets for Canadian creative expression, new exhibition windows and sources of funding for Canadian shows.

But Caplan was critical of the decision on several fronts. He said the approval of the new services will mean private broadcasters will argue that with further fragmentation of television audiences, they can't give more for Canadian programming right now.

"They've now created this great new excuse why the private sector can't give any more money until they see how the new competitors work out," he said.

Caplan, also a senior NDP advisor, was asked if the CRTC should have made its decision before Minister of Communications Flora MacDonald releases the new Broadcasting Act.

"I think if we waited for Flora MacDonald to pass the new Broadcasting Act we might be here until eternity," Caplan said.

He said CRTC chairman Andre Bureau was right to go ahead with the new services

now.

"The minister has had lots of time to make formal statements... and she has chosen to do nothing."

Repeating a recommendation of the Federal Task Force on Broadcast Policy, Caplan said a service providing public

sector, non-commercial, regional and multi-cultural programming is needed.

The CRTC's decision on specialty stations should not have blocked the possibility for such a service in the future, he said.

The minister of Communications had earlier asked the

CRTC not to close any options for something like TV Canada through its specialty programming service decision, he said.

Caplan, however, said the licensing of YTV, a national service for children and youth, was enough of a clone, although "not a very impressive

one," to block a public sector service such as TV Canada or something like it in future.

The CRTC turned down an application headed by François Macerola for a company to have been called Canadian Non-commercial and Public Television Inc.



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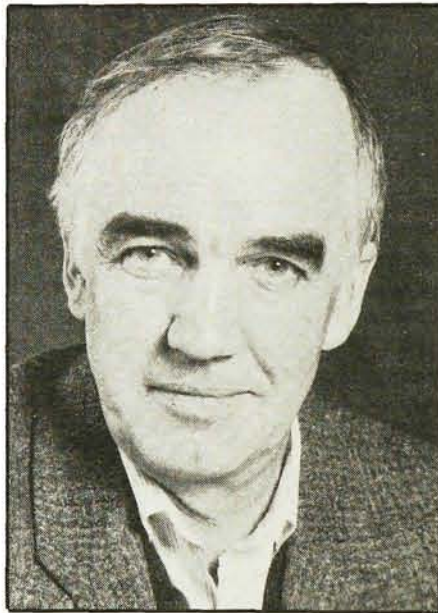
NEWS

NFB ANIMATION FILMS CONTINUE WINNING ROLL

The nomination of a Gemini Award to *Lucretia*, directed and animated by Heidi Blomkvist is the latest honour for this animation gem which has already taken awards at the Los Angeles Animation Celebration, the International Film Festival in Columbus, Ohio and the International Festival of Children's Films in Chicago. Les Drew's *Every Dog's Guide to Complete Home Safety* has most recently taken an award at the 11th International Festival of Animation Films in Espinho, Portugal. This trophy follows on the heels of awards taken in Columbus, Ohio, Hiroshima, Japan, Parma, Italy, Chicago, Illinois and Varna, Bulgaria. Other recent awards include the coveted Crystal Trophy of the International Animation Festival in Annecy, France to Chris Hinton's *Giordano* and a gold plaque of the International Film Festival in Chicago to *George and Rosemary* directed by Alison Snowden and David Fine. Earlier this year this same film was awarded the jury prize of the Festival des films du monde in Montreal.

NFB FILMMAKER HONOURED

National Film Board director and innovator Colin Low has been awarded the Outstanding Achievement Award of the Public Service of Canada. The honour, which was established in 1966, is presented for sustained and outstanding performance of duties and accomplishments by senior officers serving organizations that report to Parliament. It is regarded as "the highest award in the public service"



• Colin Low

and is presented by the governor-general, in the presence of the prime minister.

Low's most recent achievement, among the many that have distinguished his career, is the production of *Transitions*, the spectacular 3-D Imax presentation at Expo 86 in Vancouver.

Low is presently working on two large-screen projects: an Imax production to be shot in China and a follow-up to his 1960 classic *Universe*, in Omnimax 3-D.

INCEST FILM TOURS CANADA

To A Safer Place, a powerful documentary about incest, has had major screenings in seven Canadian cities from Halifax to Vancouver throughout November. In each city, turnaway

crowds resulted in the need for up to three extra presentations to accommodate public demand. Each screening was attended by the film's director Beverly Shaffer or co-producer Gerry Rogers and by Shirley Turcotte, the subject of the film. In each city, local resource people assisted the NFB guests in answering questions concerning incest and the availability of local assistance programs. Negotiations are now underway for a national telecast next year.

NFB VISITORS

Recent visitors to the National Film Board included the world-renowned Czech filmmaker Karel Zeman whose daughter, Ludmila Zeman Spaleny and her husband Eugen are presently producing a cut-out puppet film for the Board. During their North American tour, the distinguished Soviet animators Feodor Hitruk and Yuri Norstein were guests of the Film Board's animation studio. During their visit they presented a number of their films to the NFB staff.

FESTIVAL HONOURS TO NFB

Two stars of the National Film Board's *Train of Dreams*, directed by John Smith, have taken awards at the 23rd International Film Festival in Chicago. In their first screen appearances, Jason St. Amour and Frederick Ward received Gold Plaques for their outstanding performances in the film. Norma Bailey's *IKWE*, one episode in her series *Daughters of the Country* was presented with the Lilian Gish Award at the Women in Film Festival in Los Angeles as the best television production.

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All-news station good move

TORONTO – The recent decision to give CBC the license for a 24-hour, all-news television channel was the right move, says Gerald Caplan, co-author of the 1986 Federal Task Force on Broadcast Policy.

But Caplan is concerned about what he terms noises from Ottawa that Cabinet may review the decision of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). Several Tory MPs are rumoured to be strongly opposed to any further expansion of CBC services.

Given the budget cutbacks facing CBC, the CRTC cautions, early in its decision, that it must be assured the new service is not developed from funds allocated by Parliament for existing CBC services. CBC said the new service will be financially self-sustaining.

The CBC all-news channel was licensed for a three-year period starting next September 1. It will feature news reports, analysis, and interpretation of news stories through documentaries, interview and discussion programs.

The channel is not to use live sports coverage, feature films

or entertainment programs.

CBC said the new service will make use of the corporation's existing news gathering facilities across the country. Revenue will come from subscriber fees and advertising. The CRTC has limited the service to eight minutes per hour of commercials.

In its first year the channel will have a total of 187 employees, 30 more workers in the next year and 42 more in the third year.

The corporation said with the extra revenue from the news channel it will add three foreign correspondents to its current six and will devote 55.9 per cent of gross revenues from the news service in the first year to Canadian program production. That amount is to increase in each of the next two years.

Caplan said CBC's intention of ploughing any money it makes back into Canadian programming and especially on more foreign correspondents was a major strength compared to that of rival applicant Allarcom Limited of Edmonton. Allarcom's application was turned down by the CRTC.

Caplan said a private sector

initiative such as the one proposed by Allarcom would not have used its revenue in the same way. Other weaknesses, Caplan added, were that Allarcom would have had to start from scratch in terms of its news-gathering ability and that it was planning to use almost entirely non-Canadian international news sources.

Dr. Charles Allard, Allarcom Ltd. chairman, said in a prepared statement that a historic opportunity to decentralize electronic news and information was lost when the CRTC granted the license to CBC. He said the public corporation now has a stranglehold on television news in Canada, which isn't in the best interests of the country.

Despite plans for the new Canadian news service, the Nov. 30, 1987 CRTC decision states that the all-news, U.S. based Cable News Network and CNN Headline News will remain eligible services in Canada.

Attias forms Metropolis

MONTREAL – Metropolis Communications has acquired home video rights for French Canada to a package of 15 movies from King Features Entertainment.

The package includes seven completed films and eight pre-buys with titles to be named later. The completed films are *In Love and War*, *The Last Fling*, *Bay Coven*, *The Game of Love*, *Code Name Dancer*, *Bitter Creek*, *Hollow Point*.

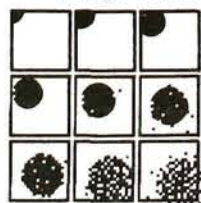
Maurice Attias and Michael Shane, principals of the recently formed company, have announced that *Return to the Titanic... Live*, the Westgate Entertainment special which Metropolis represented in Quebec, drew a record audience for the Radio-Québec television network on Oct. 28, with 1,536,000 viewers.

Previously, Attias was president of Cine 360, a Quebec distribution company.

Malo gets Glick

MONTREAL – A Winnipeg shoot began in early December on *The Outside Chance of Maximillian Glick*, directed by Allen Goldstein for producers Stephen Foster and Richard Davis. The Malofilm Group has acquired Canadian rights to the comedy and a release date is expected next fall.

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