

One obvious solution

Did one ever suspect that in the middle of the Cannes festival, four Canadian films would be drawing top box-office in the States? What balm to a beleaguered industry.

The performance of *Porky's* is topping the best of expectations, easily doubling the box-office take of *Meatballs*, which had stayed at the top of the list for several years as Canada's best performing picture. *Quest for Fire* continues its steady draw across North America, and has yet to open in many cities. In a long release, *The Amateur* continues to attract the action audience. *Paradise*, expected to finish with a box-office gross of \$12 million in North America (a figure which today seems suddenly modest but which would have seemed incredible not so long ago) will make its money back from its Italian run alone. The rest is gravy.

At home, *Scandale* continues to do hot business, and the producers expect to recoup in Quebec alone. Foreign enthusiasm and sales were the surprise of the Cannes fest, and the video cassette and late-night pay-TV market remain for American exhibition.

Francis Fox picked the month of May, when 6,000 of the 17,000 screens in North America were reflecting Canadian pictures (according to the Producers' Council) to visit the Majors. His wasn't so much a fact-finding foray as one to test the suppleness of the Majors - perhaps their imagination. It was a courtesy call, meant to express a willingness to work out, together, a changed stance for the Majors in Canada.

Implicit in the visit was the acknowledgement that the role of the Majors is central to the current success of the Canadians. 20th Century-Fox should take a large bow for its job distributing *Porky's*, *Quest* and *The Amateur*. As well, it gets no small credit for having backed *Quest* before it became a Canadian project, and for being currently involved in the production of *Porky's II*, along with Mel Simon and Harold Greenberg. The makers of *Paradise* should also give hardy thanks to Avco Embassy, the largest of the mini-majors, for its enthusiastic distribution marketing support.

Whether one talks to Film Canada people who worked for the industry at Cannes, or to those who accompanied the minister to Los Angeles, the feeling of relief is inescapable. Relief that the films are on the screens, that the public is responding, that the money will flow back into production companies.

And it is interesting to note that while all this is happening, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre runs away with an award from the International Federation of Cinema Journalists (FIPRESCI) at the Cannes festival for his *Les fleurs sauvages*, a film which most Canadians may never get a chance to see.

These differing successes - the commercial on the one hand, the artistic on the other - define the challenge before the minister. By the end of the summer, he will have before him the reports of the task forces and the Applebaum-Hébert committee. The commercial and cultural needs and aspirations will be outlined, the problems high-lighted, and various solutions suggested. He will have to weigh these against the suggestions he is expecting to receive from the Majors about their readiness to participate in a re-definition of the Canadian context.

A logical and most coherent argument can be made for the total integration of the Canadian and American film industries. The cultures are not dissimilar, the ways of doing business correspond, the markets are intertwined. The Majors would probably give up the existence of their separate distribution companies in Canada if they could be assured that, by sub-distributing through Canadian companies, they could still control the campaigns in coordination with a U.S. launch, and reap the benefits of a broad exhibition.

An additional enticement would be the suggestion that some co-production understanding could be reached, whereby the Majors could share in the fiscal benefits offered to Canadian productions. In general, the studios are cutting back on the numbers of films they produce, preferring to pick up projects from independent producers. Naturally, they exercise some measure of control over the projects in which they are partners, though they avoid the risks involved in shouldering the actual production of the film.

From a Canadian point of view, the process of integration is well on its way, and all the producers who accompanied the ministers are of the opinion that this integration is required, given the economics of the industry.

Perhaps in the difficult times facing the Canadian economy in general, and the film industry especially, the economic arguments will become overwhelming and integration will be fostered for the financial benefits which follow. After all, Louis Applebaum was quoted recently in *Le Devoir*, saying he found no such thing as "Canadian culture" as he crossed the country in search of elements to strengthen cultural policy. What kind of a cultural argument can still be made which would offset the promises of integration?

We are told that the negotiation process has begun. The question must be asked, what are we prepared to give up for that which we will gain? It will be a tough summer in Ottawa.

Meanwhile, there is Quebec. There is even Acadie. Integration is not an option, given the difficulty of cracking the North American market with French language production. So Quebec may simply choose not to negotiate, giving up both the potential benefits and sacrifices that negotiation would have entailed.

And where would that leave us? Where we've been now for a long time. With two solitudes, pulling in different directions, motivated by differing values, tearing the federal agencies apart by seemingly irreconcilable differences.

The Editors

The heart of the problem

The editors of the May edition of Cinema Canada have succeeded in presenting, in a nutshell, the confusion that continues to foil any attempt to present an understanding of the problems that plague the Canadian film industry.

Whether by design or by accident, the four major articles ("On National Cinema," "Inside the CRTC Decision," "The Forest For the Trees," and "Porky's" - a review of that film by David Eames) present a step-by-step outline of the mechanics that guide this industry's thinking.

In the first article, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre states that both the federal and provincial governments do not understand what is at stake when they allow our theatre screens and television stations to be dominated by foreign (sic American) production. His analysis is apt and to the point: "People in Canada now say that there is a film industry here, but that is just not true. An industry can be said to exist when all the sectors are integrated - production, exhibition, distribution - but nothing has been done to protect our market." According to Lefebvre, any real attempt at building a healthy national cinema must recognize the need, the essential need of having it work on both cultural and economic levels; and to do this he says we need "the political decisions and direct political measures and legislations."

As though offering equal time for opposing points of view, we then move on to the next article concerning the CRTC decision on pay-TV, whereby we find Commissioner Marc Gervais entangled in the chaos of government systems and functions and arguments pro and con and so on and so on... Gervais echoes clearly the sense of hysteria that hits both levels of government whenever the weening of Canadians from the breast of American block-busters is mentioned. In this case, Gervais predicts nothing less than revolution. The basis of his argument: "Pay-TV comes, and people are going to buy what they want, and that means American block-busters six months after they're shown in the theatres." This is begging the question, in that, if more Canadian films had a chance to be shown locally, then maybe what we would want to see is Canadian productions on our pay-TV service. If anything must change in the way our government thinks, it is in this line of argument that says the Americans must come first, clear the forests, and then gratuitously allow us to build our own settlements. History has proven that foreign trail-blazers have a tendency to set up exacting tariff points all along the way.

Allan King ("The Forest For the Trees") first tells us that only 3 1/2% of our own theatrical screen time and roughly the same amount of our television drama is taken up with Canadian productions. But at the same time he begins by saying that our first concern should be, "the place of our national cinema in an international community." And to reach this goal he drags out a new three-tiered version of the Capital Cost Allowance, that offers the old 100% for films with "lower level" Canadian content; but featuring a new 150% break for 100% Canadian content, plus "a 50% holiday on profits."

The sad image of our "national cinema" fighting long and hard for a place

on the international scene is rendered absurd by virtue of the fact that the same "national" cinema has no "nation" to return to, has no real image to reflect. Eventually, if not already, such a cinema will become the vacuous reflection of the latest film trends, the hottest genre on the market, the latest manoeuvres in the film game. The films' characters, however, like the filmmakers themselves, will remain entirely anonymous. And "faceless anonymity" is what the characters of Bob Clark's *Porky's* are destined for if one is willing to take reviewer David Eames at his word.

It almost seems as if the editors of Cinema Canada were intent upon giving us the step-by-step mechanics of the Canadian film industry:

- 1) you take the need for content regulations that would guarantee Canadian productions a "home" audience, a local market-place;
- 2) derail this need with a brick wall of government bureaucracy and hysteria that does not wish to regard the true nature of the problem;
- 3) side-step or placate the need with (hopefully) enough money to (hypothetically) allow Canadian filmmakers to find a market somewhere, anywhere;
- 4) and presto!: this is what you get: *Porky's* - a film described as a two-hour orgasm that never goes off, a "simple-minded vision" - but (and get this!) "one film that is destined to make a great pile of money." According to Eames, what we have to look forward to is *Porky's II*, "another shot at that two-hour orgasm."

And that's optimistic: a more pessimistic view would see *Porky's III* and *IV* not very far behind. I think it's fortunate that these four different voices provided us with a blueprint for getting to the heart of the problem with the Canadian film industry; and the fact that they seemed to be talking in isolation points to another problem: a lack of sustained communication between members of a community who have so much at stake.

Dan Sexton ●

That phone call that keeps cinema alive in the Atlantic

We do feel the "lazy boy's blues" in dreamer's paradise of unachieved pellicules in the Atlantic filmmaking industry.

What is the problem? Is it a country's privilege to invest and favor outside arrangements? After the war years, didn't Germany invest in its own country's achievement before grabbing co-productions internationally?

After the bilingualist's fights, shouldn't it be fair, for the sake of *creativity* that the country invests in its *own*?

We might still be dreaming and writing on filmmaking amongst the replenished wild country side of the Atlantic provinces, but... after five or six film project refusals a year, thank God for Mike Riggio's phone call that keeps creative cinema alive in Acadie.

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