

# AMPPLC

## Guest Panel

by T. Charles Lapp

The men who control the Canadian film industry and seem to make a living at it — The Association of Motion Picture Producers and Laboratories of Canada (AMPPLC) — held their annual convention April 25-27. As part of the convention a number of people were invited to take part in a panel discussion about issues and problems facing the industry.

The Panel: Sydney Newman, NFB; George Destounis, Famous Players; Graeme Fraser, Crawley Films; Michael Spencer, CFDC; Claude Héroux, Cinévidéo Ltd.; Al Bruner, Global TV Network; Phil Lind, Rogers Cable TV; and Tom Vant, Alberta Government Film Development.

A variety of attitudes were displayed by the panel members. There was Newman, the fatherly philosopher of NFB trying to allay the anxieties of private producers who are uptight about the NFB's long-standing domination, if not monopoly of Government department promotional films. There was George Destounis with his approach to Canadian films ("We'll continue to invest for 'political' reasons, but we're hopeful"). Michael Spencer was defensive and yet quite positive as he described the accomplishments of the CFDC in Quebec and half-successes in the English Canadian film industry.

Some interesting notes were sounded from the television end of the industry. Al Bruner, who is presently putting together programming for the new Global TV Network described their frustrations and successes in what has to be called a pioneering of Canadian creative talent in the TV industry. Global was granted a CRTC license on the basis that it would derive all its programming from independent Canadian producers, and would use available production facilities rather than duplicate them for their own use. In the four months since they got their license, Global has received 486 concepts for programmes. They whittled these down to fifty and found that 46% of the ideas came from Montreal whereas only 26% came from Toronto.

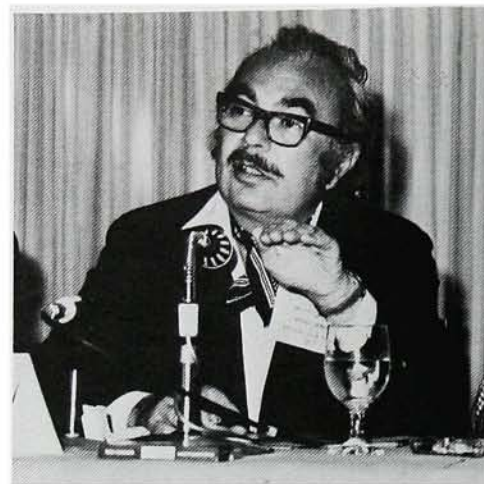
The rest came from Vancouver and other places across Canada. When it came down to final production they found that the Vancouver groups came out on top, then Montreal.

Bruner said that they were very disappointed in the Toronto showing and noted that only three members of the AMPPLC were involved with the programmes now being produced for Global. This meant that contracts worth over \$4 million were going to producers who were outside the AMPPLC. He threw out a challenge to the members, saying that there was 20 hours of prime-time television available if they can come up with the right ideas to fill it.

Phil Lind of Rogers Cable TV gave some clues about the present state of pay television. He said that one channel with continuous free movies will be started in June '73, while a channel with movies bought by subscription will be started no later than September '74. He stated that there would be a lot of money to spend on feature films and an attempt would be made to "fit in" as much Canadian film as possible. If enough Canadian films are not shown then producers should push for regulations on Canadian content. He felt that money spent on buying feature films should stay in Canada.

When asked about the impact of pay television on the theatre chains, George Destounis of Famous Players said that the major chains would survive just as they survived the introduction of TV in 1952. However, he said that it might force the closure of marginal theatre operations and some of the residential area theatres. He felt that the larger chains could exercise their buying power in order to compete with the cable market.

Michael Spencer welcomed the introduction of pay TV and intimated that it would help the Canadian film industry because it provided additional markets after initial theatre runs. He said that cassette movies would also provide another market for Canadian film in the future.



Sydney Newman, National Film Board.

Several audience and panel members focused their attention on a less optimistic aspect of the Canadian film industry: the potential loss of tax advantages to feature film investors. When asked about the present crisis in the industry over the problem, Spencer said that there was no crisis but admitted that there has been a slowdown in production due to the tax issue. He said the ultimate answer to the question can only be given by the Department of Internal Revenue; however, meetings were being held with them and he felt that some sort of compromise could be reached whereby the tax advantage might be lowered but not thrown out.

Claude Héroux of Cinévidéo Ltd. commented that the tax issue is just one of the problems which make it necessary that French and English Canadian producers work together. He thought that it would not solve the political problems, but common problems within the industry might be solved through working together.

Tom Vant from the Alberta Government indicated that they too are interested in co-productions, but they are looking south. They were apparently well-received in Hollywood when a delegation went there recently to interest producers in coming to Alberta's scenic country to make films. They apparently are also looking to invest in feature films.

The traditional chorus of the "the Quebecers are doing great, what's wrong with the English?", made its rounds as usual. George Destounis commented that Famous Players investments in Quebec films have been more profitable than those in English Canada. However, he said that they've had success with some English films, notably "Goin Down the Road" and "The Rowdyman". But even these were not on a par with a moderately successful American film. He feels that the only real market is the American market and if Canadian films can make it there, they will make it on the International market.

On the Canadian market, Destounis claims that charges of prejudice against



*George Destounis, Famous Players.*



*Al Bruner, Global TV.*



*Michael Spencer, CFDC.*

Canadian films is unfounded. He admits, however, that the American distributor is in a much more "flexible" position to get a film shown because he controls a lot more films. Consequently an American film which is a dud (heaven forbid!) will still get distributed, whereas a Canadian film won't, unless it produces immediate box-office returns. In Quebec he claims that if anything, American films are the ones pushed aside for Canadian films. This seems like an overly optimistic remark since the number of Canadian films shown in Quebec during 1972 — the highest of any province — was 26, compared with 255 American, 65 from France, 36 from England, 58 from Italy and 69 from Greece. Ontario showed only 11 Canadian films during 1972, compared with 203 U.S. films.

Sydney Newman noted that some people are concerned that the NFB is now producing features that might compete with private producers, but he feels that there is no such competition and since the features are all-Canadian, there is no waste of taxpayers' money. He said that he personally questions making them, but they have a staff which wants to participate in every form of film and they want to work with actors.

In any case, according to Newman the fastest growing market for films is not features but educational film. He pointed out that at the present time approximately 80% of all films shown in Canadian schools are foreign-made. The NFB is now negotiating with the Provincial governments to rectify the situation. They are now attempting to set up a national catalogue of educational films so that films made by one province can be used by other provinces. Newman noted that Ontario spends \$12 million per year on educational films and Quebec spends about \$3 million. However, the rest of the provinces spend very little on educational film production. He felt that the NFB was in a better position to convince the Provincial governments to make more educational films than any body of private producers. He said that the whole industry would benefit from increased educational film production, not just the NFB.

Regarding the NFB's stranglehold on the production of films by federal government departments, Graeme Fraser of Crawley Films questioned the legitimacy of having to apply through the Film Board to do a government film when the Film Board is actually supposed to be a competitor for the job. He felt that government departments should

be treated like PR offices of private companies such as "Gulf" or "Coca-Cola" who do not require special film liaison people, and can be approached with ideas directly. He noted that government film production was being increasingly directed into the private sector, but at much too slow a rate. At present Crawley does twice as much work for the U.S. Government as it does for the Canadian Government.

Mr. Newman later talked about the philosophy and "mystique" that the Film Board developed over the years. He observed that Canada really has no national body of literature or art that is world renowned, except for the work of the National Film Board which has the highest respect of film-makers everywhere. This body of work he feels is only about 20% of the Film Board's output, the rest being rather pedestrian, bread-and-butter work "to keep the labs busy" but he hopes that the percentage of superlative work is increasing.

With regards to the NFB's decentralization process Newman noted that a Vancouver production office has been opened, as well as the Halifax production unit which opened its offices in April. The philosophy of these offices is to encourage and develop local production by people in the areas concerned. He

## animation



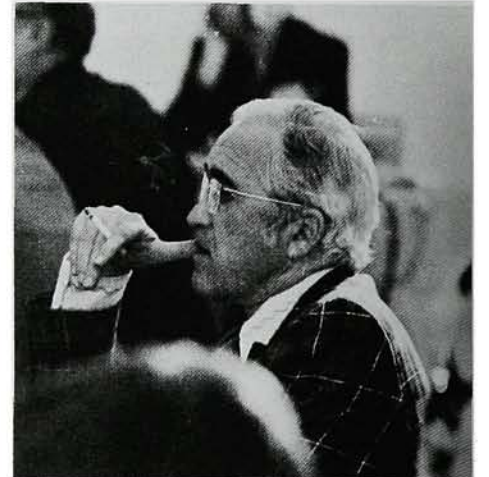
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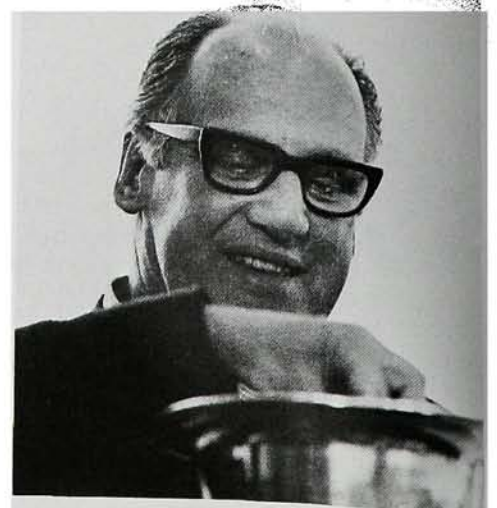


*This sombre portrait of the AMPPLC Presidents, past and present, was taken to commemorate their 25th Annual Convention, held in late April*



*Intermission refreshments courtesy of the Ontario Ministry of Industry and Tourism. Music at the banquet was courtesy of Kodak Canada, Ltd.*

said that the situation on the West Coast is fairly clear and existing talent is being trained and given access to equipment. In the Maritimes, however, the situation is less clear. The talent is there, and the role of the production office is to unearth and develop it. He noted that people should not be uptight about the NFB moving into an area because the production unit is meant to fit into the local scene and both use and upgrade local labs and facilities. Mr. Newman made a passing remark about feeling rather badly about not having a Toronto production office, but that was another question entirely. He said that the NFB intends to open a production office in Toronto, but gave no indication of When.





Graduating film students from Ryerson Polytechnical Institute recorded the entire three day convention and provided an instant replay for AMPPLC members at their farewell party.

at the Inn on the Park, in Toronto.

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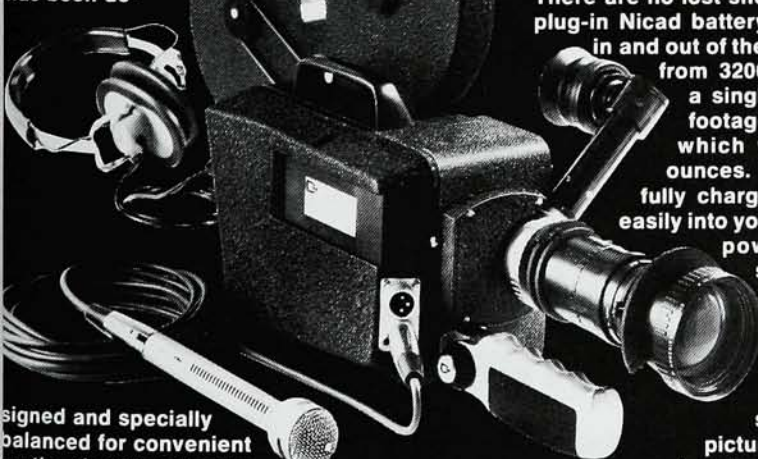


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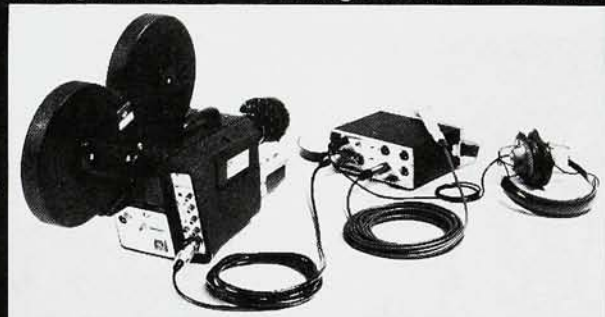
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