CINEMAG

TRADE NEWS

CRTC's Bureau warns of free trade

OTTAWA – In a tough speech to Canadian broadcasters, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission chairman André Bureau warned of the dire consequences for the Canadian broadcasting industry of free-trade talks with the United States, and predicted that the Canadian government would be pressured into making concessions unless Canadian private broadcasters began to accelerate "significant involvement" in Canadian content programming.

Speaking Oct. 22 to the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, Bureau reminded the Canadian industry "that some issues related to your activities and generally to your industry are termed by our neighbours as unacceptable irritants or even unfair practices." Free-trade talks with the U.S., Bureau said, would present "substantial challenges to your industry and to Canadian cultural sovereignty" since "our government will be pressured to make concessions."

But, Bureau reminded the industry, "you are increasingly more responsible for your evolution. Canadian content is shaping up to be a key link in that evolution. Decisions about your future must take this basic fact into account. In the increasingly competitive environment, attractive Canadian content becomes a positive element of differentiation."

Canadian broadcasters, said Bureau, "are faced with this choice to use their resources and to commit themselves, with or without co-participants, to the production of attractive Canadian programs, or to submit themselves to the complete invasion of foreign programming, the likely result of which would be giving up your claim to the Canadian broadcasting system."

However, if broadcasters were prepared to show "A high level of vigilance and significant involvement," and "speak up in a coherent, cohesive and timely manner," "we will do our best to help, taking into consideration our mandate."

In exchange for broadcasters' viewing Canadian content "as the 'coup d'accélérateur' of the Canadian broadcasting system," Bureau dangled before the industry the carrot of "a largely unregulated environment."

"The Commission," Bureau said, "would like to see a shift from detailed regulation...to less detailed regulation." This did not mean, though,"that we will renounce our mandate to regulate," but the CRTC's emphasis would be "supervisory."

The choice, Bureau clearly suggested, was entirely up to the Canadian industry.

Industry response to some of the issues in Bureau's speech came three days later in the form of the Canadian Cable Television Association's newsletter. In a front-page editorial on cultural sovereignty, association president Michael Hind-Smith stated that "A belief in cultural 'identity' is something to which most Canadians... at best, pay lip service."

Accusing the Canadian government (and in particular acting minister of Communications Benoît Bouchard's speech Oct. 15 opening the Canadian Conference of the Arts' Conference on the Future of the Canadian Broadcasting System) of "using the phrases cultural identity and sovereignty interchangeably to whip up an air of crisis," Hind-Smith argued that what was really afoot behind the "manufactured" crisis was "the CBC and its friends" buying into the agenda "for more public financing of broadcasting in the name of cultural sovereignty."

The real issue, said Hind-Smith, was not cultural sovereignty, but the CBC's concern with "employment in public television," proposed solutions to which could translate into additional taxes on cable that "would cost every cable subscriber $7.50 more each month."

What was being threatened, said Hind-Smith, was the average Canadian's "freedom to choose" to watch American as well as Canadian programming, a freedom being "threatened by some cultural equivalent to the War Measures Act."

"What Canadians want," said Hind-Smith, "is more choice and less government interference. If you need evidence that they are sufficiently dissatisfied with the restricted television diet prescribed by the CRTC, then you only have to look at the proliferating satellite receiver industry or the mushrooming in videotape sales and rentals – all 100% American viewing. That's the viewers' choice!"

Canadians, Hind-Smith said, are "prepared to support more Canadian programming – even with a 7% tax on their cable television services – but they're not prepared to accept *less* choice. And certainly not for $7.50 more a month to support the CBC."

Macerola supports free trade exemptions

CHICOUTIMI – At the Oct. 3 inauguration of the National Film Board of Canada's new Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean regional office, NFB president François Macerola bluntly stated his position on free-trade between Canada and the U.S. "The cultural industries must be exempted from the present free-trade negociations between Canada and the United States," said Macerola in a 5 1/2-page speech.

"If the province of Quebec and Canada want to maintain a continuity between their past and their future, we have to undertake dynamic measures to regain control of the cultural sector, a sector which has been which is almost completely evading us," said Macerola.

"The notion of free-trade has become a very fashionable one in our economic community as of late. However, I believe that our culture – meaning the environment in which it is growing as well as the people and institutions which control it – has to be entirely excluded from the free-trade negociations, as is suggested in the MacDonald report."

Macerola also spoke of the recent public hearings held in Montreal concerning the Quebec Cinema Act. The federal government, he said, should not fear taking the appropriate measures, regardless how unpopular they may be with the U.S., to regain control of Canada's "severely threatened" cultural sector.

Macerola stressed the important role the NFB and other such institutions must play in the distribution of Canada's cultural products. Canadian cultural institutions, in particular the film and broadcasting industries, should be owned and operated by Canadians. Macerola said.

Ontario names Clarkson to head Development Corp.

TORONTO – Initial response to the Nov. 1 announcement of the Ontario Film Development Corporation by Citizenship and Culture Minister Lily Munro amounted to "definitely a stampede," according to the corporation's chairman and chief executive officer Wayne Clarkson. One week after the OFDC's creation, approximately 75-80 telephone calls were made to Clarkson, most seeking information on the $20 million corporation's mandate, guidelines, and financing.

Joining similar bodies in Alberta, Manitoba, and Quebec that complement Telefilm Canada, the OFDC was created to provide support for film, television, and video productions in Ontario. Consisting of new money over the next three years, the corporation features an annual investment fund of $6 million to aid the province's producers, directors, writers in film and TV script development, production, and marketing. "We hope the $20 million will lever more private and federal funding so there will be considerably more production underway" and improved stability in the industry, said Clarkson. The corporation will also bring under its baili wick the Ontario Film and Video Office (the body that, formerly under the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Technology, promoted filming opportunities in Ontario to foreign producers) and the film-oriented concerns of the citizenship and culture ministry (including annual grants to the Festival of Festivals, provincial film events, and the Academy of Canadian Cinema).

Other aspects of the OFDC, whose priority, said Clarkson, will be the film industry in Ontario and feature-length films, include incentives for distributors and exhibitors to assist in launching Ontario-based films (through dollar-for-dollar advertising) and job-training opportunities for graduating filmmakers and screenwriters to aid their assimilation into the industry (financial assistance for graduates to acquire experience with production companies). At this moment, however, the corporation is very much in an incipient stage, with discussions underway with Ontario's film indus-

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Exports now on world MAP

TORONTO – Telefilm Canada has made 1985 a successful year for Canadian companies exporting television and film products at international markets, thanks in large part to the film development agency's Marketing Assistance Program. Established last February for the first market in Monte Carlo where it assisted seven wholly-owned Canadian export companies with advertising and marketing media, MAP provided $351,000 in free editorial publicity to 30 companies at last April's MIP-Television, companies which collectively garnered $5 million plus in sales. This fall, at the recent London and MIP-Com Markets, 20 companies received 50 per cent co-op funds from MAP to the tune of $500,000 – with $4 million U.S. earned in sales from both markets.

Regarded by MAP director Margo Raport as "phenomenal," that latest export coup is just part of the $11 million Cdn in total sales for Canadian film and television products at all markets this year and represents a near-tripling of overall sales from 1984. Giving Raport and Telefilm further cause for happiness is that there still remains the New Orleans (NATPE) and Monte Carlo markets in the current fiscal year. Approximately 15 companies will ply their products at both showcases, the latter described by Raport as "an extremely beneficial market for Canadians." All the legitimate sales at London and MIP-Com (i.e. signed, sealed, and negotiated deals) were primarily to TV networks, syndication, and video cassettes, with first-day offers experienced by the companies involved.

Accounting for the encouraging international reception for Canadian product, Raport credits MAP for having "really, really raised" the worldwide profile of Canada's industry and companies and helping to generate previously unseen aggressive, appropriate marketing strategies. That, together with what she described as "an abundance of product in the pipeline thanks to the Broadcast Fund," provided the basis for this year's sales windfall.