

Distribution bill still hot

TORONTO – The Liberal Party's culture critic says she is concerned with the message the minister of Communications is sending, through various actions, to the Canadian film industry and the United States at the time of a free-trade deal.

Sheila Finestone, a Liberal MP and member of the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, said the federal government's actions with regard to the Canadian film industry are creating questions that must be answered.

The proposed changes in the capital cost allowance for film investment, delays in tabling a Canadian film distribution bill, and the problems at Telefilm Canada should be viewed in broad terms, she said.

"Does the minister of Communications and Culture... realize what message this sends out to the Canadian film community and how this might make an impact in the United States particularly in the face of free-trade and cultural initiatives?" Finestone said.

"Is it responding to the American threats that they did not see culture as a real issue, but they see this as an industry?"

Finestone made the comments during an interview with *Cinema Canada* when she was in Toronto for three days of Commons committee hearings.

A Canadian film distribution bill that would make it easier for Canadian companies to distribute more foreign films in Canada is a very sensitive free-trade issue, she explained. She said the film industry is a \$9 billion income-earner for the United States.

"If Canada succeeds in passing this bill it would have ramifications around the world and therefore...they are dead set against this film distribution bill."

Finestone said she wonders whether Minister of Communications Flora MacDonald will bring in a film distribution bill with teeth or simply a hollow shell.

MacDonald announced the bill at a Toronto press conference in February with the promise that it would be tabled shortly thereafter. The bill would establish a licensing system that would open up the distribution of some foreign movies to Canadian companies.

At the Commons committee hearings in Toronto, Millard Roth of the Canadian Motion Picture Distributors Association, which lobbies for the major Hollywood studios, was asked to comment on the bill.

He said he would welcome more Canadian movies on Canadian screens. But Roth said he didn't think changing the distribution system to achieve that end would necessarily have that result.

One problem with the proposed bill is an assumption that additional money earned by Canadian distributors will go into the production of Canadian movies, Roth said. He added that he is also concerned because the downside of the bill hasn't been examined.

But Finestone chided Roth saying he hadn't given any constructive recommendations for the improvement of the Canadian film and television industry.

"I do think that is an error in judgement," Finestone said.

TFC in B.C.

VANCOUVER – The epidemic of success that has left Telefilm Canada virtually out of funds halfway through the fiscal year has not really been felt in Western Canada. In a backhanded way, that may be good news for B.C. filmmakers with projects in early stages of development.

Jean Sirois of Telefilm met with Wayne Sterloff, chief executive officer of the lottery-funded B.C. Film agency, a few days after the announcement of Telefilm's overextension. The problem: the ink was still wet on the B.C. Film press releases but already the scripts and proposals were piling up. Was there any point in opening the envelopes if the federal agency wouldn't be able to provide any matching money?

(B.C. Film had planned to commit about \$200,000 to development between now and the end of the fiscal year with

the expectation that Telefilm would contribute about \$400,000).

Sirois, apparently anxious to help kick-start the long-awaited British Columbia effort, assured Sterloff that "there was going to be a reasonable amount of development money coming to B.C. over the next five months." Sterloff says he expects close to the full \$400,000 given that Telefilm has set aside \$3 million for development in the remaining months of this fiscal year. (With 92 per cent of existing Telefilm commitments going to central Canada, less than \$5 million is little more than a token catch-up in the minds of many West Coast producers.)

Sterloff, who is as familiar with Telefilm's problems as anyone in the country, is also suggesting that the new provincial agency may be able to help out filmmakers who have been caught in the cash crunch. He's

talking about providing interim financing through B.C. Film to projects in pre-production or with shoots planned for winter or early spring. Telefilm would return the funds in the next fiscal year.


Lupien to SGCQ

MONTREAL – Lucette Lupien has been appointed a creative director of the Société générale du cinéma du Québec.

The appointment was announced recently by Jean-Guy Lavigne, president and director-general of the SGCQ.


As one of three SGCQ creative directors, Lupien will be responsible for informing writers, directors, and producers of SGCQ guidelines.

Lupien has worked in the public and private film sector. She was the director-general of the Conseil régional de la culture des Laurentides.





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