

Theatre owners support law

MONTREAL – The Association of Cinema Owners in Quebec Inc. (ACOQ), representing over 200 screens in the province, is strongly in favour of a proposed Quebec government bill to provide greater and more immediate access to English films dubbed in French.

The 56-year-old association is in full agreement with the spirit and objectives of article 83 of Bill 59 but has recommended slight modifications.

Marc Paul, president of the ACOQ (which counts among its members the Cineplex Odeon chain with 91 screens in Quebec), says the adoption of the Quebec Cinema Act in 1985 has already led to "a vast improvement in regard to the release of the French version of feature films."

Contrary to what the opponents of the proposed legislation are saying, Paul says article 83 of Bill 59 (an amendment to the Quebec Cinema Act, Bill 109) will ultimately lead to a "day and date" situation in the booking of dubbed feature films in Quebec cinemas.

Statistics prepared by the Jolicoeur research team for the Institut québécois du cinéma show that the dubbing of English-language films will remain profitable for distributors, particularly the U.S. major distributors who have indicated opposition to the bill.

Jolicoeur research shows that 81 per cent of tickets sold on the association's theatrical circuit in 1987 were sold to people whose maternal language is French; 62 per cent of this French-speaking public saw American films in the French version and only 38 per cent in the original version; 69 per cent of videocassette fans rented the French version.

The ACOQ has also provided box office figures for current features films showing a higher box office gross for the dubbed version. After 13 weeks in Montreal *The Last Emperor* grossed \$159,000 in English and \$244,000 in French. *Inner Space* grossed approximately \$400,000 in English and \$700,000 in French. *Kenny (The Kid Brother)* has grossed \$250,000 in English and \$1.5 million in French. *Nuts* has grossed \$450,000 in English and \$415,000 in French with an independent theatre run still to come at press time.

According to the ACOQ, these statistics indicate that a majority of francophones would rather see a dubbed version in their own language.

To accommodate these wishes and to accelerate the time it takes to exhibit a dubbed version, the Quebec government has promised (in the amended article 83) to limit to a single copy the number of prints of an English-language film that can be exhibited in Quebec cinemas

unless French-language versions are released simultaneously.

Because there is a concentration of English-language moviegoers in the Montreal area with an established tradition of going to the movies, the association recommends that article 83 be "more flexible" by allowing a limit of five to six English-language films for exhibition prior to the release of dubbed versions where a dubbing commitment has been given by the distributor.

Where a film does not prove to be popular (in any language), three undubbed prints will be permissible for a period of 30 days.

"We are trying to find an equitable way to handle the problem," says Lorne Bernard, vice-president of the association and operator of drive-in theatres in St. Eustache and Gatineau.

"The fact that the dubbed version is coming means that the French-speaking people can see it immediately or after a reasonable delay. At the same time the anglophones can see the films they want and we end the abuse by certain distributors who flood the French-language markets with English films."

The U.S. majors can also take heart, says Bernard, in the association's recommendation that films dubbed in France should be acceptable in the Quebec market. The majors have stated that protectionist laws in France make it unprofitable to dub in Quebec (as prescribed by article 83) for a limited Quebec market.

Bernard says he is confident that Bill 59's article 83 will get satisfactory results. He says the only thing that can place the English-language filmgoer at a disadvantage is a battle between the Quebec government and the U.S. majors during consultations on Bill 59 this summer.

"There is a certain mentality that wants to protect the English-language gross without any competition," says Bernard.

"Of course if a film plays in English for eight or nine weeks by the time the French version comes out the grosses are not there because the film has been milked," he says.

"If the majors want screentime then they should show a certain amount of discipline."

Ostry joins in free trade chorus

VANCOUVER – TVOntario chairman Bernard Ostry took St. Patrick's Day as the occasion to throw his qualified support behind a celebrated pact between two world leaders of Irish extraction.

In an address to the Canadian Club entitled "Canadian Trade and Culture in a Global Economy: The Political Challenge," Ostry addressed the Mulroney-Reagan free trade deal.

Putting it in the context of "globalization", he said that with the increasing interpenetration of national cultures and economies, Canada's cultural producers and legislators must move confidently into the "echoing labyrinth of the

post-modern world." This means competing internationally without protectionist measures.

"As globalization moves forward, relentlessly, bilateral free trade promises to quicken the pace and soften the effect," Ostry said.

After citing the international acclaim showered on Canadian productions from *Un Zoo la nuit* to *Anne of Green Gables*, Ostry went on to insist that government match its development of broadcast technology with increased funding of Canadian production.

"We have already invested in the finest infrastructure of telecommunications in the world, and continue to build on it. And now our first priority should be large investment in production and in those regional cultural programs that stimulate production and the emergence of talent.

"Acknowledging that globalization is an increasing trend that cannot be stopped by tariff barriers or even by heavily policed frontiers is the first step to realizing that it offers us a glittering opportunity."

Americans lay down the law

TORONTO – On Feb. 21, U.S. producers working in Toronto were given the opportunity to discuss grievances and concerns about Canada/U.S. relations in the film industry.

The Canadians were not shy to respond in this strident exchange of information described as, at once, "sobering" and "refreshing".

"A lot was said that needed to be said," says David Plant, film liaison assistant in the Toronto Film Liaison Office.

The most recurring theme of the afternoon, says Plant, was the 15 per cent withholding tax with the narrowing dollar exchange taking a close second place.

"It was an opportunity for the producers to get direct feedback," says Plant.

The following press release entitled "Toronto Film Community Opens Dialogue with U.S. Producers" was issued by Universal Productions Canada, a Toronto production office of Universal Pictures currently shooting *Sea of Love* with Al Pacino.

"For the first time ever, unions, guilds, associations, representatives of various government offices and members of the private sector servicing the Toronto film community gathered together to discuss the needs of American producers in Ontario. The purpose was to plan long-range strategies for dealing with the issues facing the Ontario film community brought about by the surge in production here.

"Hosted by the Directors' Guild of Canada and moderated by lawyer Peter Steinmetz, the session featured seven production executives, whose cumulative production budgets have

brought \$256 million of production to Ontario, making it the third largest production centre in the world after Los Angeles and New York City. Discussion was limited to service production and focused on issues such as: cast and crew concerns, the shrinking margin on the U.S. dollar, pre-and post-production services, Immigration regulations, U.S./Canadian tax issues, locations, and increasing competition from other jurisdictions.

"Representing producers were Norman Powell, CBS Television; Dennis Brown, ITC; Dan Heffner, Disney Studios; Ted Zachary, Tri-Star (via video tape); Norman Jewison, Yorktown Productions (via video tape); Brian Hickox, Fries Entertainment; and Steven Stern, Sharmhill Productions.

"The various unions, guilds and associations represented included: ACFC, ACTRA, CAMERA Local 81, DGC, IATSE Locals 873 and 667, NABET, The Ontario Film Development Office, The Toronto Film Liaison Office, Immigration Canada, Revenue Canada, production managers and the private sector. The by-invitation-only event was held at the Sutton Place Hotel on Sunday, February 21 and was viewed as the initial step in improving relations with U.S. Producers."

Investigation of Telefilm heads expected

OTTAWA – The resignation of Jean Sirois as chairman of the board of Telefilm Canada this month is not enough, say his critics.

The extravagant spending habits of Sirois during his first 18 months as chairman may be revealed in full detail when the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Communications and Culture launches an inquiry into Telefilm business later this month.

Both Ian Waddell and Sheila Finestone, communications critics for the NDP and Liberal Party, respectively, and members of the parliamentary committee, have asked for a committee inquiry.

It is uncertain whether this inquiry will be a special inquiry or take place in the context of the annual Telefilm budget estimate study which is held in tandem with CBC budget estimates and that of the department of Communications.

The parliamentary committee is currently concluding its report on the broadcast act and will hear the budget estimates after April 11 when the House returns from the Easter recess.

Ian Waddell told *Cinema Canada* that the purpose of the inquiry would be to allow Sirois to respond to allegations of financial mismanagement. Sirois has indicated that he is willing to face an inquiry.

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"We want to get Telefilm functioning again," says Waddell who adds that "the Mulroney government has practically destroyed culture in this country by gross political appointments."

One way or another, says Waddell, Communications Minister Flora MacDonald will be questioned by the committee either during budget estimates or during a special inquiry.

Peter Pearson, the former executive director of Telefilm who resigned last October, sending a letter to MacDonald about improper business transactions by Sirois, is reportedly less agreeable to the idea of facing an inquiry.

However, Waddell says Pearson could be subpoenaed to an inquiry and that refusing to respond could have legal ramifications.

In recent weeks, allegations of financial mismanagement have been made public. It is now also known that over \$400,000 in legal fees for work done by Sirois' legal firm was charged to other government offices. Sirois has notified MacDonald that he does not wish to be reappointed as Telefilm chairman this month.

An examination of the chairman's expense account has revealed that Sirois spent \$76,398 on 70 trips during his first 18 months with Telefilm

but MacDonald has argued in the House that it was incumbent upon the board of directors of Telefilm and not herself to keep tabs on the spending habits of the chairman.

Despite best efforts Bethune still off-track

MONTREAL - The Chinese did everything in their power to live up to the spirit and the letter of the co-production agreement for *Bethune: The Making of a Hero*, say the Canadian co-producers.

Canada's most ambitious film undertaking has been delayed because of the failure of the Canadians and the Chinese to anticipate the production standards and capabilities of each country.

This difficulty, combined with time lost to infighting between director and producers, is said to have ultimately cost the \$16 million production an additional \$2.3 million needed to complete three weeks of shooting in Montreal (originally scheduled for mid-September 1987) and one week in Spain.

Despite the celebrated feud between actor

Donald Sutherland and writer Ted Allan on the interpretation of Norman Bethune's character - and, consequently, on the tone of the script to be used in the remaining scenes - there is industry speculation that if finances were in place, director Phillip Borsos and producers Nicolas Clermont and Pieter Kroonenburg would have left their respective camps (in the feud) long ago and joined together in the business of making a movie.

The \$2.3 million deficit is the result of logistical and language problems during the China shoot. Inadequate processing facilities there forced the costly necessity of sending film to Vancouver.

But Kevin Tierney, the publicist for the production who had previously taught school in China and who visited the shooting location during the 15-week shoot (April 15 to August 6, 1987), says China's August First Studio can't be blamed for not fully delivering a promised \$6 million in services.

"They gave it their best but they don't have the same standards as we do. If you've seen as many Chinese films as I have you know what I mean," says Tierney.

"This film is just as important for the Chinese. Bethune is a communist hero and a far greater

hero in China than he is here."

At press time, Telefilm Canada had tentatively approved an additional \$2 million with the remaining \$300,000 promised by the Chinese. A Telefilm spokesperson said investment conditions are an approved budget, script and guarantee.

Telefilm's initial investment was \$3.7 million in the film and TV mini-series.

CBC has provided \$1.6 million and the bulk of financing, \$10 million, has been raised by a public offer.

It was also reported, at press time, that the completion bond guarantor, Performance Guarantees of Los Angeles, was considering replacing the producers to facilitate the additional Telefilm funding.

The producers have said they are at a loss to understand the bonder's position and that the real issue is not loss of confidence of the leading actor and director but rather a question of creative control.

They say their principal concern is that the bonder does not seek a legal claim against the Chinese co-producer.

Bethune: The Making of a Hero is a Canadian-Sino-French coproduction. Belstar Productions of Paris has contributed \$2 million.

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