Anti-Censorship Mood Grows In Argentina, But Government's Firm

Buenos Aires, Feb. 15.

They all charged against film censorship: producers, distributors, exhibitors, directors, writers, actors, technicians, journalists, you name them. The attack covered several fronts and lasted for over a month. Eventually it lost steam. And film censorship is still alive and well and living in Argentina.

Exhibitors and distributors argued with President Bignone's secretary of Public Information, Oscar Magdalena, that the banning of nearly 400 pics since 1975 and the scissoring of many more during same period had eroded the interest of viewers to the point of reducing the habit of cinemagoing to its lowest level in memory.

The Film Censorship Board, in a paid advertisement, suggested that the drop in attendance could have been worsened by ticket prices that have risen beyond the reach of most people. To back its claim, the FCB pointed that the Spanish pic "Solos en la Madrugada" (Alone At Dawn) had sold 709 tickets on a Thursday, at full price, and 3,393 the following Wednesday, at half price.

What the FCB apparently forgot to mention is that Thursday is usually the weekday with the lowest attendance, while Wednesday almost always registers the highest. Neither did the FCB mention that it had banned "Solos en la Madrugada" and that the pic was being shown without cuts only thanks to a court of appeals decision that ended a two-year judicial battle.

The ad also pointed to five more pics which had tripled their biz.

The FCB also renewed its claims that it couldn't be blamed for a lack of product to release, since it had given the greenlight to over 60 pics. Exhibitors and distributors, for their part, stressed again that they need films without cuts to lure the viewers back to the theatres. They also asked once more that the banning of many pics be lifted.

A second feud erupted between the censors and the Film Critics Association, when the former refused to authorize a one-day showing of some films the critics wanted to include in its second International Avant Premieres Fortnight: Stanley Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange," Hector Babenco's "Lucio Flavio," Louis Malle's "Pretty Baby," Richard Brooks' "Looking for Mister Goodbar" and Carlos Saura's "Mama Cumple 100 Anos" among them. The censorship law allows for such exceptions.

The journalists answered with a strong statement which was prominently printed in all newspapers and magazines, besides being read in radio newscasts, and cancelled the Avant Premieres Fortnight.

Afterwards the authorities of the Urguayan beach resort Piriapolis offered the site to unspool the full program since those pics are not banned in the neighboring country.

Year-end also saw a union-backed protest march and delivery of an anti-censor petition addressed to president Bignore.

German Pic Falloff

Frankfurt, Feb. 15.

The Film Service of the Catholic Film Commission for West Germany has just made a detailed study of the full-length features available in this country last year, indicating that there were only 349 films in the theatres last year, a drop of 38 over the previous year.

Scot Theatre Chain Hit By Homevid, Circuit Lock

Glasgow, Feb. 15.

Theatre earnings by Caledonian Associated Cinemas, the indie group with cinemas in many Scottish towns, are being hit by the increasing use of videocassette recorders, according to the company.

Another problem, it claims, is the monopoly on distribution of films exercised by the big two U.K. cinema circuits, EMI and Rank.

Caledonian announced interim 1982 pre-tax profits up from $400,000 to $600,000, but with a warning that all is not as it may seem. Cost of refurbishing theatres charged against profits totals $150,000 this time compared with $400,000 last year.

"This explains the increase in profits, notwithstanding the drop in turnover in our cinemas," said a spokesman. "Theatres are still experiencing very difficult trading conditions."

Shaws Close 15 Sites In Singapore, Malaysia, Blame Homevid Boom

Singapore, Feb. 15.

The homevideo craze in Singapore and Malaysia has forced the Shaw Organization, the biggest cinema owner in the two countries, to close 15 cinemas — nine in Singapore and six in Malaysia.

Shaw's has also laid off about 30 staffers who worked in three of the cinemas that have been closed.

Television entrepreneur Robert Chua, who is based in Hong Kong, has taken over one of the cinemas and is converting it into a live theatre. Another cinema, the Capitol, one of Singapore's oldest, has to go because it will be on the route of the proposed mass rapid transit project.

Takeover

In Malaysia, the government will take over two cinemas in Penang. Four other cinemas in the towns of Alor Star, Kota Bahru, Kulim and Kangar, will be closed this month.

A Shaw source said: "The thinking of the top management in Shaw is that the video boom is spoiling the film industry."

A survey taken last year indicated that 20% of households in Singapore own a vidcassette recorder. An average of 5,500 seats were bought monthly for the 12 months ending last April.

What Is Acceptable?

Doha, Qatar, Feb. 15.

Considering the range in subject material of the 11 films recently banned by Qatar's Minister of Information Issa Ghanim al-Kuwari, it must be difficult for film importers to know what to choose. The banned list ranged from something as harmless as Francois Truffaut's kid-pic "L'Amant de Poche" (Small Change) to admittedly erotic "The Postman Always Rings Twice," with the reason given as "including immoral and offensive scenes."

The others were "Private Lessons," "The Human Tornado," "California Dolls," "Pretty Baby," "Slaughter," "The Touch," "Gangster," "Blood Money," and "The Howling."

Also nixed was Agnes Smedley's book, "The Great Road."

Next Variety Late

Under the Federal policy of celebrating many holidays on Mondays, Washington's Birthday this year falls on next Monday (21) with post offices, banks, businesses and the usual services shut down. Hence *Variety* will go to press next Wednesday, not on the normal Tuesday.

Readers are advised to expect *Variety* to be one day late on newsstands and in the mails.

OZ INDIE FILMWAYS TAPS EXPLOITATION PIX FOR 1983 SKED

Melbourne, Feb. 15.

For Filmways Australasian Distributors, 1982 was a year of consolidation, per joint managing directors Mark Josem and Robert Ward. This indie distrib scored well with the Christmas release of Albert Pyun's "The Sword and the Sorcerer" and the continued healthy biz of Jeremy Paul Kagan's "The Chosen," now in its seventh month in a Melbourne suburb and soon moving into the city.

As an indie distrib, Filmways doesn't get the blockbusters, but rather, per Josem, buys "the bread and butter films for the drive-ins in Australia." These include the triple bill horror and triple bill sex pics. Twenty exploitation films will be shown over the next nine months by Filmways.

Upbeat about their schedule for the first half of 1983, Filmways will be releasing the Aussie film "Dusty," directed by John Richardson, about a half wild, half domesticated dog and his relationship with the only human he ever acknowledges as a friend; Chris Fitchett's "Desolation Angels," an action-adventure-thriller, and Australian Film Institute 1982 award-winner for best screenplay, "Goodbye, Paradise," scripted by Bob Ellis and Denny Lawrence and helmed by Carl Schultz.

Also skedded for release are Clive Donner's version of "Oliver Twist," starring George C. Scott, and a new Canadian pic, Claude Jutra's "By Design," a modern tale about two lesbian dress designers who decide they want a baby, starring Patty Duke Astin.

American releases include Jack Fisk's "Raggedy Man," Mark Forstater's U.K. sci-fi thriller "Xtro," helmed by Harry Bromley Davenport, and horror pic "Alone In The Dark," starring Jack Palance and Donald Pleasence.

Filmways is also producing its first feature, "The Naked Country," based on the Morris West novel. First draft has already been scripted by Ross Dimsey, former topper at Film Victoria, and Morris West will assist on next draft. Storyline pits the skill of the white

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Censors Seek Balance

Madras, Feb. 15.

N.K.P. Salve, Minister for Information & Broadcasting, told members of the South Indian Film Chamber of Commerce and the Film Producers' Guild of South India that his Ministry was preparing new guidelines for the censors, which would maintain a balance between the need to encourage creativity and cultural values and the increasing stress on sex and violence in Indian films.

The Minister emphasized that "we cannot allow social objectives to be bartered away in the name of entertainment" and added that it was time a line "was drawn between creative freedom and vulgarity."

Zeffirelli And Rosi Are Linked In Battle Over Twin 'Carmens'

Rome, Feb. 15.

Franco Zeffirelli and Francesco Rosi, two of Italy's leading filmmakers, have exchanged verbal jabs here in a controversy generated by Zeffirelli's disclosure of plans to follow "La Traviata" with another opera film based on "Carmen."

Rosi has been prepping his version of "Carmen" for Gaumont (France) for more than a year with the active consultancy of orchestra conductor Lorin Maazel. In the last two or three months, Rosi completed his cast by signing Placido Domingo in the role of Jose, Julia Migenes (Greek-Puerto Rican singer and ballet dancer discovered by Maurice Bejart) for the role of Carmen and Ruggero Raimondi (Don Juan in Joseph Losey's "Don Giovanni").

Rosi and Maazel also completed the guide track two months ago in Paris and shooting is scheduled to start June 7 in Andalucia on exteriors in Seville, Cordova and Ronda on a 13-week shooting schedule.

From Zeffirelli's account, "Carmen" has been on his selected group of film operas (also comprising "La Traviata," "Aida" and "Turandot") for years. He also stated in an interview here last week that opera is his cup of tea — not Rosi's — and announced a start on "Carmen" next June. Zeffirelli said he had a finished shooting script but has yet to cast the project. "If the performers I want are not available," he stated here, "I will go with the best young talent I can find."

Upshot of Zeffirelli's decision to join the "Carmen" ranks (Spain's Carlos Saura has a start on a ballet version of the Bizet opus soon with dancer Antonio Gades) apparently developed after a successful preem late last year in Los Angeles of "La Traviata" to qualify for Oscar nominations.

According to Zeffirelli, Universal then acquired "Traviata" for release in the U.S. and Canada and the Yank major requested another one. Universal, like Zeffirelli, is convinced the market is ripe for multimillion dollar opera films and is prepared to get behind him on "Carmen."

Having postponed the start on his ambitious tv series (with built-in feature) "The Florentines" until March 1984, Zeffirelli is free this year to pick up the cue from Universal, whose new classics division is releasing "Traviata" toward late spring.

Unperturbed, Rosi has not raised the ethical issue of another filmmaker tackling the same opera when the Rosi project was fully set after long preparation. He certainly has no intention of abandoning the field to Zeffirelli and said that two versions of the same opera might be flavorsome for world audiences.

Bottom line reason for the sudden splurge of "Carmen" film projects, Rosi noted whimsically, is that the opera recently entered public domain.

Ster Kinekor Continues To Close Film Situations

Capetown, Feb. 15.

Continuing the latterday trend here to establish smaller cinemas in shopping complexes, Ster Kinekor closed its Kine 700 Parow situation, a suburb of Capetown, and opened two 150 seaters in the Sanlam Shopping Centre nearby.

The Mayor of Parow officiated at the openings of respectively, the UIP-Warner release "The Trail of the Pink Panther" and the Afrikaan film "Bosveld Hotel" (Bush Veld Hotel) were presented.

Ster-Kinekor will also be closing the Kine 1 and 2 in the centre of Capetown presently, due to economic and other reasons, and the building will be demolished, thus ending one-time "Theatre Land" cluster comprising the Alhambra, Colosseum, Royal and the Metro, all of which have been demolished and replaced by office blocks over the past few years.

The Kines 1 and 2 was originally the Van Riebeeck cinema which was opened in 1952 and named after Jan van Riebeeck, who discovered the Cape.

Censor Nixes But Appeals Board O.K.'s 'Monsignor,' Dublin

Dublin, Feb. 15.

Given the thumbs down sign by film censor Frank Hall, 20th Century-Fox's "Monsignor," starring Christopher Reeve and Genevieve Bujold, has been given the greenlight by the appeals board here.

Picture is skedded to open at the Ambassador, Dublin, at the end of February, but city councillor Ned Brennan is seeking to stir protest against the screening. Admitting he hasn't seen the picture, he says "On the basis of the information available to me, I do not think that the film should be shown on moral grounds."

Brennan added in his protest, "I would be against a love affair between a priest and a postulant nun being shown in a film because I don't believe it happens in real life."

So far his protest has produced little reaction. Censorship has eased here in recent years, although still cracking down on porn.

Beirut Punk Defunct

Beirut, Feb. 15.

A psychosis of violence by a punk rock movement has created a wave of fear in East Beirut and its suburbs and has petrified parents of teenagers. Young girls and women have come under attack at the hands of punk-rockers with sadistic tendencies.

Police are now carrying out a "hunt" to chase down punkers, the movement having been imported from the West. Police recently entered Espace Center in Zouk Mihael (a cluster of film houses and amusement centers near Beirut), fired in the air and started hitting punk-dressed adolescents. A rock concert was due to be held in the hall.

In the mountain regions, where the movement appears to have taken hold, with young people dressed in chopped hairdos and chains around their necks and ankles, teenagers have also been beaten up, evidently a move to forestall any spread of the movement.

Calcutta — The National Film Development Corp. has advanced all the required funds to Satyajit Ray to make his Bengali film "Ghare Bhaire," based on a story of the same name by the late poet Rabindranath Tagore.

New Delhi — The Assam State Government has exempted all films that have won national awards from payment of entertainment tax.