

Quebec dance troupes protest funding policy

By JAMIE PORTMAN
Southam News

OTTAWA — Angry members of three Quebec dance troupes demonstrated in Ottawa yesterday to protest the Canada Council's continuing refusal to fund their activities.

But while an estimated 200 demonstrators chanted protests outside the council's offices, chairman Maureen Forrester defended the federal agency's dance-funding policies. The renowned Canadian contralto rejected charges of discrimination levelled by members of Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal, Ballet Eddy Toussaint de Montréal and the folk dance group Les Sortilèges, and defended the council's long-established dance evaluation process.

She said assessment juries have a rotating membership. "People are judged by their peers . . . It's a very honest and just system."

At a noon press conference, representatives of the three Montreal troupes — who are incensed at having been turned down for council funding — charged that the system was discriminatory and unjust.

"We have performed to rave reviews on every continent, and the dance section of the Canada Council still continues to find excuses to say we're not good enough artistically to merit council's support," said Rich-

ard Gervais, chairman of the protest coalition and president of Les Ballets Jazz.

Gervais suggested the incestuous nature of the Canadian dance community made it possible for the council "to stack the decks against us." He also suggested Ontario dance companies are generously funded at the expense of those in Quebec.

Council dance grants for 1986-87 show about \$4 million went to 13 groups in Ontario, while \$1.8 million went to 15 groups in Quebec. However, more than half the Ontario grant goes to Canada's largest classical dance company, the National Ballet.

Council director Peter Roberts said Quebec receives 22 per cent of the agency's total dance budget. "Our mandate is to try to develop excellence where it exists," he said.

Eddy Toussaint said it's unfair for his work to be constantly judged by assessors from Canada's large classical companies including Montreal's Les Grands Ballets Canadiens and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet.

But Forrester defended the decision to deny the Toussaint dancers funding over the years. "We went outside the country to get an outside assessor who gave his evaluation without ever seeing the evaluation of anyone else." The outsider came to the same conclusion — Toussaint didn't deserve funding.