

Government Orders

Another departmental organization that should be looked at in the Department of Canadian Heritage is the Canada Council. The Canada Council provides grants for all kinds of Canadian artists and people who should be and would be producing art anyway. We spend tens of millions of dollars through the Canada Council every year to pay people to produce what they at Canada Council call art.

I would argue that before there was a Canada Council and in spite of the Canada Council people still create art. I know in my own riding there are many people who are painters, writers, who are thrilled to try to produce art not because they get paid to do it but because it is a creative impulse that they have. In order to satisfy that impulse they produce art and all of society is enriched for it.

What I really like about it is taxpayers are not expected to pay for it. They are not expected to either fund the artist or to buy the art. Contrast that with the Canada Council where we have tens of millions of dollars going to publishers so that they can produce books from writers who are also funded and then of course they sit on shelves forever. I read a book actually that was funded by the Canada Council about the abuses in the Canada Council, believe it or not. It is a great irony that it is almost impossible to write a book in this country without it being funded by the Canada Council because those funds go directly to Canadian publishers. That is one of the strange ironies.

This particular writer talked about a warehouse being devoted to all these volumes of Canadian literature that people simply would not buy. They could not even give it away.

When they proposed to send packages of Canadian literature around to schools, even to prisons, they were rejected. I suspect rightfully so because at the end of the day beauty is in the eye of the beholder and people have to make these judgments for themselves.

I think that is the best argument of all for not having an organization like the Canada Council that completely distorts the marketplace and really cheapens the product because many very good Canadian writers are lumped together with the ones who are not very good. In the eyes of people who try to follow this they get a jaundiced view of Canadian culture because so much stuff comes out that is not good. It is funded by the government and people get a jaundiced view and at some point say perhaps all Canadian culture is not very good. That is very unfortunate. There is a lot of good stuff out there. Because of organizations like the Canada Council people get a prejudiced view of what we can produce in this country. That is very unfortunate.

Another institution that causes people to wonder about the government's spending of tax dollars is the National Film Board. My colleagues from the Reform Party in this House have raised the issue of a series of videos funded by the National Film Board on lesbian love. They were restricted videos, ones that contained very explicit scenes. This causes us to pause and wonder whether this government is serious really about cutting spending at all.

There are many millions of dollars spent by the National Film Board every year. Should there not be some strict guidelines that that say anything that is pornographic in nature or is x-rated should not be produced particularly with taxpayers' dollars when so many taxpayers would reject that?

● (1725)

That is not what the Liberals think. It begs the larger question of whether there should even be a National Film Board. It seems to be largely unaccountable.

I would argue that many private producers of films would love to step in and provide films for schools as is done actually in the United States. I had a lady in my own riding who came to me and said she would like to show National Geographic films in the school. She wanted to know how she could go about getting the rights to them. As it turns out it actually offers these to schools for free. The National Geographic Society is a society that is funded by individuals, not by taxpayers. Why could that not happen in this country? I would argue very strongly that it could.

Let us talk for a moment about the department for the status of women also under the aegis of the Department of Canadian Heritage. One of the jobs it has it seems unfortunately is to fund private interests including the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, a group that is highly politicized, very narrow in its focus and absolutely and completely does not represent the views of all Canadian women no matter what it tells us. If it is so certain of its position, if it really does believe that it represents Canadian women then it should go to Canadian women and get its funding from them directly. I would absolutely support it in doing that.

At this point in this country when we are in such a terrible fiscal situation I encourage the government to take a look at the complete Department of Canadian Heritage to seriously evaluate whether we need great gobs of that department and to really finally get its fiscal house in order.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Daviault (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I realize I have only a few minutes. I have the pleasure to rise to speak for the second time on Bill C-53, An Act to establish the Department of Canadian Heritage.