

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the arts and artists have faced no greater threat to their well-being than the treatment meted out of late by Revenue Canada Taxation. The current crisis, however, is not one of nature so much as of degree: the problems have existed for a long time and, left unresolved, have become so pronounced as to engage the attention of the House of Commons and its Standing Committee on Communications and Culture.

For years now, the Canadian Conference of the Arts, its member associations, individual artists and federal departments and agencies responsible for culture, have been urging the resolution of the long standing tax problems affecting the arts and the cultural industries. The attitude of the departments responsible for tax policy and practice -- the Department of Finance which establishes tax policy, and the Department of National Revenue which interprets and administers it -- has been a serious obstacle to progress. While unstated, or unstated in so many words, the official view seems to have been that the problems were not serious and that, given sufficient time and neglect, they would either resolve themselves or simply disappear altogether.

The Canadian Conference of the Arts, however, has maintained throughout that the problems were critical and, if left unresolved, could only worsen. Recent developments have proven us correct. There is no joy, however, to be derived from having our predictions borne out in fact: many Canadian artists have been subjected in recent months to harsh, undue and unjust treatment because our concerns were not heeded and acted upon. While the recent onslaught has at least finally focussed public attention on the matter, the toll exacted in achieving this has been great. Many artists have been reassessed for staggering amounts which -- given the woeful economic status of Canadian artists -- they can afford neither to pay nor appeal. The impact on these individuals is hard enough to bear, but they are not alone: the recent actions of Revenue Canada Taxation exact their cost in terms of our status as a country, a society, a civilization, and all of us must share this burden.

To be an artist is to pursue a profession which places one in a unique position: one hazards the customary social, economic and political recognition accorded to other pursuits, and little recompense and recognition -- in comparison to the investment of time, energy and talent -- accrues in one's lifetime. Yet as a society, we gain immeasurably from the work of our creators, in social, political, economic and cultural terms, and cannot therefore permit the interpretation and application of our tax legislation to exacerbate the already tenuous position in which our artists find themselves.