

*Government Orders*

Now, how would you describe this person from the tax point of view? Is he a student? A contractor? An employee? For performing artists, this kind of life tends to be the rule, not the exception. It is bad enough artists have trouble surviving. It is intolerable that they do not have a recognized special status in this country.

The purpose of the bill before the House today is to officially recognize the importance of artists in our society. It covers the whole area of professional relations between artists, associations and producers under the jurisdiction of the federal government, including the CBC, the National Film Board, the National Arts Centre and the broadcasting industry.

[English]

The bill provides for the creation of a tribunal parallel in structure to the Canadian Labour Relations Board which is designed to be sensitive to the specific needs of Canadian artists. It will do this by accomplishing three tasks. First, it will divide the arts universe into sectors. Second, it will certify an artists association for each sector. Third, it will regulate scale agreements entered into by certified associations and producers.

The principal advantage of this process is that artists and producers associations which are certified will no longer be liable to prosecution under the Competition Act. The tribunal will be vested with the powers needed to arbitrate grievances, to settle cases of unfair practices, and to impose penalties for infractions.

By legally acknowledging the specific working conditions of artists and recognizing their right to form associations and negotiate minimum conditions of work, this bill will finally establish a place for artists in our labour relations legislation.

I am aware that representatives of the artistic community have expressed some concern regarding certain aspects of the operation of certified associations under the regime instituted by the bill. The Minister of Communications has indicated the government's willingness to consider improvements to the relevant provisions provided that any modifications are seen by all sides as preserving the balance and the basic principles underlying the legislation.

Bill C-7 also creates a council on the status of the artist to advise the Minister of Communications on matters relating to the professional status of the artist as well as to conduct further studies and research.

The council is composed of outstanding Canadians who promise to speak forcefully and effectively on behalf of their colleagues.

The highlights of the bill are formal recognition of the professional status of artists in Canada, the creation of a tribunal, and the formation of the advisory council. However, no one should view this bill as the sum total of what we need to do for Canadian artists. Rather this bill is a foundation upon which we can build. It is a stepping stone to examine a whole range of issues which affect artists. We are taking measures to protect artists' royalties from the bankruptcy of a cultural enterprise. In addition we hope to put a program in place which will ensure that the artist receives the royalties which are his or her due.

Recently my colleague, the Minister of Finance, prepared legislation which allows employed artists to deduct some of their professional expenses. It will also provide incentives for visual artists to donate their paintings or other works of art without penalizing them on their tax returns.

These are but a few examples of actions we are taking in this field.

[Translation]

With Bill C-7 before the House today, the government wishes to provide a framework for government involvement in the arts community which goes beyond mere subsidies. In fact, my colleagues and I see the arts world as a dynamic and growing industry that goes to the very heart of our identity and deserves government support.

• (1730)

I am convinced that Bill C-7 will improve the status of the artist in Canada, but I would also like to address some doubts that have been voiced in this respect.

Some members of the arts community said they were afraid that decisions by the tribunal on the status of employee or dependent contractor, as opposed to independent contractor, might be reviewed and reversed by the Canada Labour Relations Board.