

*Government Orders*

The fact is that our artists, our performers, have to grapple with the same economic hard times as the rest of Canada. Being the parent of two artists, one a dancer and singer and the other a singer, I must say that as a parent, proud as I am of their talents and skills, I cannot help but say that I feel a gnawing concern about their financial futures. The starving artist is in fact too much of a reality.

For example in 1990 ACTRA members earned an average of \$8,540 from work as professional performers, writers and broadcast journalists in the recorded media.

• (1810)

Revenue Canada information indicates that professional artists are among the lowest paid groups of workers in society. In fact they are the lowest paid group in society. They earn less than pensioners. Self-employed artists in this country earned an average annual income of around \$16,000 in 1988. This small pittance was not earned without hard work and without having gone through a great deal of training and apprenticeship in their crafts.

The average artist has acquired 17 years experience in his or her artistic field and devotes from 35 to 45 hours a week to their crafts. So there is a significant need to attach to the status of the arts the appropriate economic return to ensure that artists and their families can survive.

The New Democratic Party supports this legislation because the New Democratic Party supports the arts and the artists' place in this nation, not because it is politically convenient but because the arts is an important component of Canada's well-being.

We see the work of the artistic community as being somewhat complementary to the goals of our own party. That is to improve and enrich the lives of Canadian citizens. That is not just in an abstract way. There are significant economic benefits that accrue from the creativity of artists. It is one of the most important portions of our economy and those who are engaged in this enterprise should be aptly rewarded.

In supporting Bill C-7 we are acting in accord with our past record in supporting legislation, as we did for a revised Copyright Act, that would enhance the status

and the economic returns for those who are engaged in the creative arts.

Bill C-7 comes at an interesting time. It comes at a time when we are trying to define ourselves and determine what gives us unity. We must recognize that an important part of this projection of our unity and the identification of what constitutes the basis for our national unity is the contribution of the country's painters, writers, performers, designers and poets. They must be recognized as important to crystallising that identity.

We support Bill C-7 because it recognizes the important contribution of artists to the cultural, social, economic and political enrichment of Canada, as well as the right of artists and producers to freedom of association and expression. It does indeed give legislative force to their recognition as professionals.

It also calls for the establishment of a permanent Canadian Council on the Status of the Artist with a mandate to promote the interests of artists not only to the Minister of Communications but generally throughout this nation, to enhance the status of the arts and artists, and to maintain close association with those organizations that represent the artistic disciplines across Canada.

Most important, with respect to the desperate economic straits of professional artists, Bill C-7 provides for a Canadian artists and producers professional relations tribunal which will be responsible for overseeing the collective bargaining process in the arts and culture sector, including the recognition of professional associations and the creation of a process for negotiation ending in arbitration.

This is an important step which recognizes the unique position and unique needs of artists and separates them from the purview in most aspects of the Canadian Labour Relations Act. The tribunal in defining the professional status of artists will determine whether, for example, a person is a producer or an artist or whether an independent contractor is a professional artist or not.

This is a positive move, according to artists, toward the same rights as other workers and other professionals have. There are, however, significant flaws in the legislation which we hope to address in committee and to which we hope the government will be sympathetic.