

Adjournment Debate

Armed Forces where it would no doubt disrupt operations, but would also be wasteful in terms of money which is always in short supply.

I reiterate, the inference that there are mechanical faults in the fleet at the present time is false, incorrect and completely misleading.

[Translation]

CANADA COUNCIL—ALLEGED SCANDAL AT SHERBROOKE,
QUEBEC

Mr. Claude Tessier (Mégantic-Compton-Stanstead): Mr. Speaker, I rise in order to follow up on the question I put on May 5, 1983, to the Minister of Communications, who is responsible for the Canada Council. Actually, within the framework of the Oral Question period I did not have the opportunity to put my question clearly and completely, for it would have had to be preceded by a long preamble in order to be easily understood. Since questions from the government side must be shorter than those coming from the Opposition benches, that is, without any preamble, my question was not complete and hence, the answer was also incomplete and most unsatisfactory. That is why I must put it again today, and in doing so, I hope the matter will be deferred to the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture and that officials of the Canada Council will be called on by the Committee to explain publicly the decision to subsidize to the tune of \$9,500 or \$12,500—I would like to know the exact amount—the Art/Action performance produced by Darcheu, a so-called artistic performance produced from April 29 to May 1, 1983, by the Association d'artistes contemporains de l'Estrie.

Does that mean that we should add another \$3,000 to set fire to irons in Montreal, with the same kind of gawking onlookers as were seen last weekend?

In Sherbrooke, the so-called Art/Action performance consisted of two artistic events, that is, artistic only for the so-called initiated, while normal and ordinary people would rather consider these eccentricities as being committed by crazy people or else drug addicts completely reckless and “freaked-out” or “permanently high”, as such artists might say. Should I even try to argue as to whether this was really art? I do not think so. I will simply say that a first demonstration consisted of setting on fire a car in which live rats had been placed, while costumed people were gesticulating all around, the whole thing being watched by a handful of spectators who were not even entertained, except for the so-called initiated.

● (1820)

The second consisted in distributing to members of the audience small bags containing wood and paper shreds stuck between two planks and then cut with a chainsaw. If, at least, this was art for the initiated, well and good! But what is even

worse and not good enough is that those events were subsidized by the Canada Council.

Mr. Speaker, I must admit that it is very difficult for the Minister of Communications (Mr. Fox) to tell the Canada Council anything because he would be accused either of not understanding a thing about art, as others have been before, or even worse, of interfering for purely political reasons. It is much too easy to deny the Minister the right to intervene, and the Canada Council must be warned that if it spends public funds, it must be held accountable according to the standards approved by so-called normal Canadian taxpayers, both when they pay and when they see what they have paid for.

Mr. Speaker, in my opinion and that of many others, the action performances in Sherbrooke and even in Montreal are a waste of public money, and there can be no justifiable reason for us, as elected representatives of the people, to tolerate such waste. If such insanity must be treated, the Minister of Health should be asked to take care of it, but the Minister of Communications should not be asked to promote such things and even less to finance them. This is not art or even a sickness, but shameful goings-on that the Government should ban and prevent. It even has the duty to protect the people against this type of manipulation. Consequently, because normal and right-thinking people need to be reassured about the Minister's ability to act under such circumstances, the Minister must be accountable for the use of this subsidy, otherwise he must publicly denounce the Canada Council, or at least take this opportunity to warn the Canada Council that such outrageous waste of money might jeopardize the allocation of funds by the House and the Government. As members of the House, it is inconceivable that we should agree to be party to such waste. Mr. Speaker, I have with me a letter which Mr. Timothy Porteous, the Director of Canada Council, addressed to the Minister of Communications and which reads in part:

“That the artists involved in the Sherbrooke incident are supposed to be people of experience. That his only qualm is that they violated a municipal by-law which makes it illegal to start a fire without a proper permit, and that the release of live rats before the fire would be a significant point and would indicate the participants' opposition to the use of animals in laboratories.”

It becomes therefore extremely difficult to separate the four-legged rats from the two-legged variety.

Mr. Speaker, the Canada Council is clearly trying to find an excuse, but I think we should urge the Minister to have the Canada Council appear before the Committee on Culture and Communications in order to account for this subsidy which was granted to this group in the Eastern Townships.

[English]

Mr. Jack Burghardt (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, at the request of the Hon. Member for Mégantic-Compton-Stanstead (Mr. Tessier) I