

Government Orders

At a time when museum attendance has been steadily increasing and contributing to the economy of Canada through cultural tourism, we cannot afford to abandon our duty to continue to inspire our people to partake in the cultural harvest of our nation.

Museums are more popular today than ever before. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that our country is getting older. It is 128 years old. We have a lot of heritage; heritage that has been captured by our artists, heritage that expresses Canada in all of its manifestations. We have a duty to encourage artists, to support donors, to support designated institutions so that this heritage in art form is preserved and protected because we will be a stronger country for it.

• (1150)

Imagine for a moment what future generations of Canadians would think of us if we were oblivious to these facts, if we ignored these facts, if we let these precious pieces of heritage slip through our fingers, allowing these precious pieces of heritage to be squandered. They would condemn us. They would assess us very harshly. However, we would not have to wait for the evaluation or the assessment of history. I think our contemporaries would treat us very harshly.

Canadians know what this country is all about. Canadians know what our heritage is all about. They also know what it takes to preserve that heritage because they know a country is not here for just today, tomorrow, next week, the week after, the month after or the year after. Like so many countries, Canada is here for a long, long time. In recognition of that we have legislation to support our artists, our donors, our institutions and the public at large.

I think all Canadians, all taxpayers, support this. They will not share some of the criticisms we have heard of the bill. Of course no legislation is perfect. As long as human beings are what we are, imperfect, we will often create imperfect legislation. However, I think we have done a good job on this. Certainly the institutions have told us that. The museums have told us that. They came before the committee and praised this legislation. They praised the minister. They praised all of us in the House and they want the job done. They do not want this frivolous talk, this carping from the other side of the House.

Criticism for criticism's sake does not make any sense. If you have something worthwhile to say, say it. To stand up on your hind legs, to carp and to criticize just to fill the air does not make sense. I think the opposition does us a disservice when it grandstands, when it indulges in that kind of talk. We want responsible debate. In some cases we have fallen short of the goal of responsible debate.

Canadians support the legislation and they want it passed. That is all I have to say and I hope we can have this legislation passed as quickly as possible. Canadians want it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): We will now move to the next stage of debate in which members will be entitled to

20-minute speeches subject to 10 minutes of questions or comments.

Mr. John Maloney (Erie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise this morning on Bill C-93, an act to amend the Cultural Property Export and Import Act, the Income Tax Act and the Tax Court of Canada Act.

The Cultural Property Export and Import Act came into force on September 6, 1977 together with certain complementary amendments to the Income Tax Act. The purpose was to preserve in Canada significant examples of Canadian heritage through the use of a system of export controls, tax incentives for private individuals who donate or sell cultural objects to public institutions, and assistance to institutions in purchasing cultural objects under certain circumstances. Bill C-93 would affect only the use of tax incentives. It is an amendment to the original act.

• (1155)

The legislation will establish an appeal of decisions of the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board to the Tax Court of Canada. This bill is being sponsored by the Minister of Canadian Heritage and it is his responsibility through the Department of Canadian Heritage to develop, implement and promote cultural policies that will enable Canadian creators to flourish and Canadian consumers to enjoy and benefit from a wide variety of cultural products.

The federal government clearly has a role in the development of policies and programs designed to encourage the production and preservation of Canadian cultural materials.

In the area of heritage policies and programs the Department of Canadian Heritage provides support and assistance to museums across the country while at the same time ensuring that our national institutions, including the National Archives, the National Gallery, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Museum of Nature, the Museum of Science and Technology and the National Library, function in an environment conducive to giving Canadians maximum access to our cultural heritage.

Culture is fluid, always changing and must not be looked on as something rigid or something around which barriers or parameters can be built. Culture is diverse. Customs that may seem strange to one culture will often be part of the daily life of another.

It is for these reasons that it is important these cultures are reflected in the collections of our museums so that others will be exposed to them, will learn from them and will in turn understand them.

The Cultural Property Export and Import Act already serves as a vital instrument to protect Canada's diverse cultural heritage by building strong public collections. Bill C-93 will serve to strengthen this legislation and will help to ensure the history of all Canadians is preserved for future generations.