

Arts to be on the bargaining table

by Regina Behnk

Putting culture on the trading block has long been debated in the artistic community. Leading members of that community met in Edmonton Art Gallery auditorium this Saturday to discuss freetrade and the arts.

The purpose of the meeting was to seek the recommendations from the guest speakers and the audience regarding this issue. The recommendations were noted and will be reviewed with the Communications Minister, Marcel Masse, during a scheduled meeting in March with the representative from Alberta's government.

Publisher and chairman of the Council of Canadians, Mel Hurtig was joined by Susan Crean, author, broadcaster, and journalist who were opposed to free trade. Stephen Hume, poet and editor stood alone in favour of free trade.

Crean began the debate by stating that, "A common thought in many circles of society is that culture as a public enterprise has lost its usefulness." She argued avidly for the maintenance of corporations like the C.B.C. She then questioned the effectiveness of Cultural Sovereignty, a scheme under which cultural issues will be free from external control.

Crean was unclear as to what this term really meant, "This notion means that the cultural industry would be kept off the negotiating table in talks with the U.S. about free trade. But what constitutes the cultural industry?" she questioned. "It sounds like a consolation prize," she continued, "If we

"...we don't want to have a passionate love affair with them."

trade away our fisheries, forestries... at least we'll have culture!"

A lawyer in the audience responded, "I want our cultural industry on the negotiation table (in talks for free trade) because I'm afraid if they aren't on the table, they will be traded under the table."



Author and broadcaster Susan Crean

Mel Hurtig certainly gave the most cogent speech. He opened, "1986 is the most important year in modern Canadian history." He then quoted Robert Borden who in 1911 said "This is not a debate of markets and markets alone, but a debate about our very destiny." Hurtig cleverly continued by quoting from Brian Mulroney during his 1983 election campaign, "I don't want to discuss the issue of free trade. That was decided back in 1911!" Ironically, Canada is once again seriously considering free trade with the United States. "The Mulroney government is the most continentalism government ever in the history of Canadian government," deplored Hurtig.

Stephen Hume, on the other hand argued that "Presently three-quarters of our exports and imports are with the United States. They are our largest trading partner." He continued, "If we have to share this continent with them, I would rather share it on good terms that bad." He sustained, "Two-thirds of Candians are in favour of free trade. But they don't trust Mulroney to negotiate fairly on our behalf." He continued, "Canadian culture is stronger today than it has ever been. This is at a time when economic ties between the two countries are also the strongest."

Hurtig responded, "This debate is not about free trade, but about an economic

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treaty. This treaty would inevitably lead to the creation of a customs union which would in turn lead to a common market." He described it as harmonization. Not only would our culture be effected by such measures but it would also lead to changes in our tax system, our legal system, our trade policies with other nations and even our social policies. Essentially all our policies would have to be similar to those of the United States.

Hurtig had an extensive list of areas that the U.S. government wanted free access to in Canada. The list made reference to our waterways, fisheries, forestries, all our natural resources, our banking system, the list goes on, and each suggestion is more shocking than the previous one.

Ed Shaffer, professor of Economics at the University of Alberta, was present at the seminar and commented, "Free trade assumes a world of perfect competition... this is an illusion. Free trade would give multi-national U.S. industries a foothold in Canada." He continued, "Once we take the first step towards free trade we will have to go all the way." He concluded his commentary "It's nice to have a neighbourly relationship (with the U.S.), but we don't want to have a passionate love affair with them."

In an interview Carl Hare, chairman of the U of A Drama department discussed the drama scene in Canada. Presently there are

approximately 3000 Canadian actors inscribed in the Canadian Actors Equity Association. Should a Canadian performer choose to work in the U.S. he must acquire a green card, occasionally this permission is refused. Hare said, "We presently have about 300 theatrical companies financed by the Canadian Council. The ratio of actors to theatres in Canada is the best anywhere." He continued, "Free trade would create a north-south migration of actors. The small number of Canadian actors (in comparison to the U.S.) would make it complicated and pose a threat to the Canadian performer."

"It has only been twenty years since Canada has broken from the Colonial culture style of acting," Hare claimed, "We are still struggling to develop the Canadian culture. We must continue to develop this culture indigenously." On the issue of free trade and the arts, Hare said, "We must decide if we are to develop our culture internally or along with the Americans." He cautions that if we opt to develop with the Americans that we should be wary of the numbers; a "Mouse and Elephant" syndrome may develop. He concluded, "Free trade won't kill Canadian culture, it will just lose its importance."

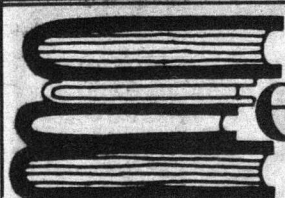
Mel Hurtig concurred that free trade would create a North-South migration of goods. He stressed that Canada should diversify its trade, not seek negotiations with Japan?" Hurtig questioned.

The fact is Japan is the most technologi-

"Free trade won't kill Canadian culture, it will just lose its importance."

cally advanced country in the world, "It also has the most protected market," said Carl Hare.

Stephen Hume agreed that "All the speakers (at the seminar) have legitimate concerns," "We should be tough in our negotiations for free trade with the U.S."



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