

Canada Council

taxpayers' dollars are spent, with the fond hope that perhaps somewhere down the road, someone from Canada Council will have the courage to say no when this sort of thing is brought before them again, and they can go on and do the work they should be doing.

Mr. Gus Mitges (Grey-Simcoe): It is a great pleasure for me, Mr. Speaker, to participate in this debate in support of the position taken by my hon. colleague, the Hon. Member for Prince Edward Hastings (Mr. Ellis). I support his motion questioning the wisdom of the Canada Council giving grants to one by the name of Bill Bissett, a self-styled poet.

There is no question, Mr. Speaker, that we have a responsibility to keep our culture and heritage alive and to keep our identity ever present. However, there is also no question that some recipients who have been granted funds from Canada Council, ostensibly for this very purpose, have not followed through. To them, Canadian patriotism and nationalism has become not the last refuge of the scoundrel, but the first sanctuary of the rip-off artist. One glaring example is the person by the name of Bill Bissett, who seems obsessed in the writing of poetry with repeating obscene four-letter words over and over, which really depicts what many people think his poetry is all about.

Regardless of the protestations of concerned citizens all across Canada, which were completely ignored by the Canada Council, the pundits in that Department continue to fund this individual so he can produce even more of his so-called poetry which no newspaper in the country would ever think of printing. As my colleague from Prince Edward-Hastings stated, this man has received some \$53,274 of Canadian taxpayers' money from the Council to produce his filth. If he had used his own money, that would be his own personal business; but for Canada Council to continue to fund him, courtesy of taxpayers' dollars, is wasteful and unforgivable. Writers who write what people will not read serve no purpose other than their own self-indulgence. If such people want to feed their own self-indulgence, then let them do it with their own funds, not with the hard-earned money of other people, such as Canadian taxpayers. Let them write on their own time and expense. There is always the possibility that in the process of earning a living, they might even become better writers.

I do not think it is the responsibility of the taxpayer to support writers when no one will pay to read their works. For that matter, why should the taxpayer support theatre which no one will pay to watch? Tax dollars were never meant for the purpose of providing writers, actors or producers with an ego-satisfying outlet or income. There is nothing wrong with amateur drama groups, but I do not believe they should be subsidized by the state.

I have personally been actively involved for over 20 years in an amateur drama group in my own home town of Owen Sound, the Owen Sound Little Theatre. Not once has our group requested financial assistance, either provincially or federally. We have always stood on our own two feet, ever improving ourselves and our play productions, which has helped to maintain continued and active support by the people in our community over the years. Such grants, I believe, only

serve to smother motivation and incentive, not to mention desire and ambition. If it cannot be accomplished without grants, then it is not worth being done.

Canada Council makes awards to some 90-plus publishers and periodicals in Canada. I believe this not only encourages mediocrity, but it punishes the talented. If publishers did not receive public money they would be more discriminatory about what they publish. They would really have to hustle to sell books and promote authors.

There is no question in my mind that art and cultural have always been part of human nature and will continue to survive in one way or another despite any intervention by the State. If the Canada Council is going to continue to dole out taxpayers' dollars, it must tighten up its requirements and more actively critically investigate every application before it is approved. In other words, the people in Canada Council must take extra pains to live up to their mandate and trust so that they are never violated.

The people at Canada Council are not an entity unto themselves. They are answerable to their peers; at least, they should be. But despite all good advice and constructive criticism, Canada Council always turns a deaf ear and continues to carry on in a haphazard manner. Members of Parliament who have seen the obscene poetry of Mr. Bissett have expressed utter amazement that Canada Council have supported such works. Even reprimands from the Auditor General has not fazed Canada Council. The Auditor General's report on the Canada Council cited the "lack of adequate documentation on some of their files both for applications submitted and for subsequent action on individual projects", and that this inadequate documentation was "very extensive, costing the taxpayers several million dollars".

● (1720)

It is a sad state of affairs, Mr. Speaker, that the Canada Council is not even accountable to the Secretary of State (Mr. Joyal). The Council reports through him directly to Parliament. This is a totally inadequate way to allow for ministerial responsibility for accountability by the Canada Council to Members of Parliament for the spending of millions of dollars annually. This is totally unacceptable in a democracy. What it means is that the taxpayer will never be allowed to know or pass judgment because the Canada Council refuses access to information by Members of Parliament and the Minister. All I can say, Mr. Speaker, is, how autocratic can one get?

Let me repeat that Canada is still a democratic country, not a dictatorship as the Canada Council would like us to believe. All of us in public office, elected or otherwise, are responsible to the people of this country and not the other way around. I fervently believe that the Canada Council should get their act together, shed their arrogance and disdain for others, get out of their cocoon and become part of the real world. People who continue to live on cloud nine can do so if they wish, but they are not the kind of people in whom I would put faith and trust to manage and disburse millions of taxpayers' dollars. Commonsense, Mr. Speaker, is the bottom line. It is too bad that