

Adjournment Debate

administering this program by compensating retailers for actions they may take to accommodate their customers' needs.

On balance, the Government believes that these positions will minimize any cash flow costs that retailers may face, while providing a substantial benefit to Canada's primary producers.

CULTURAL AFFAIRS—SPECIAL INITIATIVE FUND. (B)
ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Ms. Lynn McDonald (Broadview-Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, on April 29 I asked a very straightforward question of the Minister of Communications (Mr. Masse) concerning the special cultural initiatives program and possible irregularities in the awarding of grants under this program. It is one of the few programs which is actually getting more money because the money comes from lotteries, not from general tax revenues. While there have been arts cut-backs, this special cookie jar fund of the Minister has been getting more money.

I do not want to complain about any of the particular programs which have been funded. They all sound as if they have at least some merit. I am not in a position to judge their actual merits. However, I wonder about how these decisions are made. The special cultural initiatives program brochure dealt with the previous guidelines for projects. Those guidelines no longer hold. They were for the last fiscal year. The Government has not announced any guidelines, and the Minister told me that under the circumstances the old guidelines still hold. His own Department does not say the same thing. If one phones in and asks what are the guidelines for getting money for this program, he is told that there are no guidelines. Groups do not know where they stand.

• (1810)

Unfortunately another message is coming out of all this. If you want access to this program you need political connections with the Conservative Party, perhaps with the Prime Minister's Office or the office of the Minister of Communications. This is indeed shameful. When I asked the Minister about this he did not deny my allegation that connections of a political nature are what counts for getting grants. He could provide no criteria by which these decisions are made.

Since the case I raised with him on April 29, other grants have been made; one to a circus, Cirque du Soleil, of \$750,000. With this money it will be possible to import a big top from Italy and put on circus performances, no doubt a very laudable cultural activity. I certainly think circuses are to be supported, but why this particular one? Why not other circuses? Who makes these decisions? What connections are needed? This is a lot of money for the arts field, \$750,000.

Then we had an announcement about Stratford. I am a great fan of Stratford. I congratulate them on "Measure for Measure" which I saw on Saturday, but what about the Shaw Festival? Why is it not getting money? More than \$250,000 is going to Stratford to tour in the United States. It is very good

for Stratford to be touring, but other companies would like that money as well.

The arts community will no doubt tell us that the money could be spent on Canadian theatre. Why should all that money go for English theatre while Canadian theatre is being starved? The Shaw Festival is an excellent festival. It is not getting comparable funding. Why is it being denied funding? We do not know the answers to these questions because the regular arts agencies that evaluate requests from all the companies which develop criteria and which have a peer evaluation system are not the agencies that are making these decisions.

Furthermore, on the question of touring, a most laudable objective, the recommendations which the Government had accepted in Opposition and promised during the election campaign have not been respected. For example, theatre groups have been asking for advertising in the United States to promote theatre in Canada. The Government has not done anything about this. The latest advertising in the campaign of the Department of Tourism still features beavers and flapjack contests. This is what the Americans are being told about Canadian culture, not about our Canadian theatre. Why is money not going to promote Canadian theatre in the United States? Instead we have this cookie jar being used for certain companies under certain criteria that we do not know.

The Minister says as long as money is being spent under his Department, that makes it democratic. I asked him about this in committee. He seemed to imply that channelling money through the Canada Council was undemocratic because the Canada Council is not a government Department. Now we have the ludicrous example of a Minister saying that to keep the election promises of his own Party would be contrary to democracy. This is absolutely shameful.

Surely the most basic notion of democracy is that a Government is accountable to the people, and that for an election campaign to have some sense there is a discussion of the issues with the Parties taking different positions. If the position taken by the Party which wins power is not respected, that is an abuse of democracy. The Minister does not understand what democracy is all about. He does not understand that the arts community wants more funding, not less. It wants that funding to go into the regular arts agencies. It wants jury selection and criteria which are accepted within the arts community.

While we are having these very serious cut-backs which hurt the arts community, it is very wrong to see actual increases in funding available for the arts going into this special fund under the Minister's jurisdiction. We want more funding and we want it through the agencies of arts community trusts. We want the agencies to have much more accountability to the community. We want the community to make recommendations for appointments. We want the Minister to respect the arts community, which is what he promised, certainly what his Party promised in the election campaign.

[Translation]

Mr. Geoff Scott (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member has raised