

*Cultural Assistance Policies*

I have been contacted on a regular basis since early 1983 by the Hillsborough Girls Choir. Hillsborough is a small village in my constituency of Fundy—Royal. This choir, while it is considered to be an amateur choir, has performed all over the world and has proudly represented this country on many occasions. Apart from its local performing schedule, which is very extensive for an amateur group, the choir has performed across Canada in competitions and workshops. It performed for the Governor General in 1981 and for Prince Charles and Princess Diana in 1983. The Hillsborough Choir recorded an album in 1982 and on several occasions it has performed on both radio and television.

The choir's visit to Wales also in 1983 was the subject of a documentary produced by the New Brunswick Department of Education. This was broadcast locally as well as in the public network in Maine. The Hillsborough Choir has, to its credit, an impressive and extensive list of both national and international awards.

Besides the various things I have mentioned, I think it is important to know that the school choir was honoured by an invitation to the World Music Congress in Oregon back in 1984. It was at the opening ceremonies of the Canadian Music Educators' Conference in Sackville, New Brunswick, in May of 1983. It has been on two consecutive occasions the winner of the Leslie Bell Choral Award, both in 1981 and 1983, for the most outstanding choral performance. It has as well attended international competitions in Wales, as I previously mentioned, in 1983.

All one has to do is to look at what the Hillsborough Choir has accomplished since it was established in 1979 to admit that these so-called amateurs are just not simply a bunch of girls from Hillsborough, New Brunswick. This group has made a significant contribution to Canadian culture. The choir and its director, Mrs. Ruth Schiller, has displayed a dedication and professionalism which is, I believe, unprecedented for a school-based amateur choir. These are only a few of the reasons I have introduced this motion.

I find it particularly disturbing that the Hillsborough Girls Choir has been treated with, I must say reluctantly, such a small amount of respect by the federal Government. The choir has never once received any form of assistance from the Government, either the previous Government or the present Government, to pursue its goals. I have tried over the years to secure even the smallest amount of financial aid for the choir and every time, for one reason or another, I have run up against a stone wall. The federal Government policy simply does not support or endorse groups like the Hillsborough Girls Choir who ably represent Canada around the world.

I understand that the federal Government cannot become involved with funding every single amateur choir or organization that springs up. I am not suggesting that. I am, however, suggesting that organizations that are deserving of federal assistance should have it made available to them by some means. What is most perplexing about federal government

policy in the field of cultural assistance funding is the fact that there are amateur choirs, groups and organizations, which are actually receiving funding from the federal Government. Unfortunately, this funding is only available to groups that are considered multicultural. I find this a little unfair. Indeed, Canada is a multicultural nation, a fact we should be and have been promoting for many years. But there are a lot of people all over Canada who are losing out because their group or organization does not conform to the criteria for consideration under the multicultural guidelines. Many people simply do not understand why one group may be funded while another is not.

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Members of the public often do not differentiate between one federal program or another. They see that the grants come from the federal Government and when one group appears to be favoured over another, the public has the impression that the federal Government is biased in its distribution of funds. This might not be the case but, certainly, the public perception in my riding tends toward precisely such a view.

As an example, the constituents who have contacted me quote the case of the Hillsborough Girls Choir, arguing that the group performs in both official languages of Canada and five other languages representative of a small part of Canada's diverse ethnocultural background. The choir itself is not a Ukrainian choir, or a Chinese choir, or an Acadian choir, nor does it purposely reflect any other visible minority group but, rather, it is representative of our unique "Canadian culture", and Canada's diverse ethnic and cultural roots through music and the languages in which they perform. Some of the group's repertoire has been composed in Canada by Canadians. This is Canadian culture. This is, to quote a popular phrase, "Canada's unique cultural identity".

The second point of contention I have with the present government policy is in its support of the performing arts. When the case of the Hillsborough Girls Choir was again brought to my attention in September of 1987 I wrote to the Minister of Communications (Miss MacDonald). I would now like to take a moment to read from the reply. It says:

I fully recognize the meritorious achievements of the Hillsborough Girls Choir over the years and I am sympathetic to its needs. However, I must advise you that the cultural initiatives program administered by my Department is designed to assist the professional artist. Policy discussions took place in the fall of 1986 concerning the funding of amateur organizations between interested Departments and agencies at the federal level. Due to the number of projects submitted by professional organizations and limited financial resources, it was decided that the federal cultural bodies could not commit themselves to fund amateur groups.

I must reiterate that I do not believe that it is possible for the federal Government to fund all amateur groups such as the Hillsborough Girls Choir. I am merely advocating that some of the federal money spent to promote the performing arts should be going to encourage the development of young performers by sponsoring amateur or semi-professional groups, such as the Hillsborough Girls Choir, which do not have access to the