

Government Orders

Bill C-7 had its beginnings 11 years ago when Canada signed the UNESCO recommendation to consider the implementation of a broad range of policies to recognize and encourage the development of the role of the professional artist within society. That UNESCO resolution included funding, training, professional status for artists, access to social programs such as health care, pensions and unemployment insurance, and protection from unfair labour practices.

Pursuant to that, in 1986 the hon. minister of culture of the day appointed Gratien Gélinas and Paul Celene to consult with Canadian creators to develop recommendations for the federal government as to how to implement the spirit of the UNESCO declaration.

The 41 recommendations made dealt in the main with measures which fall under federal government's domain. The very first recommendation that the government acted upon was the creation of the Canadian Advisory Committee on the Status of the Artists.

Under the co-chairmanship of Paul Celene and Henri Dominique Perras, it included representation from major disciplines in the arts. It developed draft legislation referred to as the Canadian Artists' Code with the Department of Communications and other departments of the federal government.

In 1989 the then Minister of Communications appeared before the committee on communications and culture regarding various policy options on the status of the artist. That committee eventually made 11 recommendations in its report to the government.

In May 1990 the government tabled its response to the standing committee and promised the following measures: first, to extend the right to collective bargaining for self-employed artists and the creation of appropriate administrative procedures; second, to create a permanent body, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of the Artist, to advise the government on a continual basis on ways to improve the socio-economic conditions of professional artists; third, to provide a maximum \$1,000 employment cost deduction for employed professional artists; fourth, to provide a mechanism through which visual artists can donate works of art from inventory for tax credits; fifth, to protect the royalties of artists from the bankruptcy of a producer; sixth, to recognize the right for compensation for public use of works of art;

and, seventh, to provide a statement of fundamental principles.

• (1740)

The absolute necessity of this bill having the teeth to deal with the recommendations promised by the government can be seen by anyone who has had anything to do with almost any segment of the artistic community of this country.

We have across this country thousands of people who live basically a hand to mouth existence. It is an amazing thing that two years ago I attended the ACTRA lobby on the Hill. It was a very exciting day to meet face to face with some of the most revered and respected actors on the Canadian theatre, television and movie scene.

I spoke to one woman who shall go nameless, but her name would be instantly recognizable across this country, and she told me that for the year just past she had made in the vicinity of \$4,400 in her profession. It is a ludicrous amount of money. We know that.

Frequently, as artists will tell you themselves, they do not have much choice in the matter. There is something in the God-given talent that they have that says to them: "I must do this. I don't have a choice. If I don't do this, my life is not working the right way. I am not happy". It is unfortunate that in pursuing the muse, in pursuing the talent that they were born with, they are forced to live in what does not even come close to a poverty line existence in this country.

It is something that we cannot as a nation go along with any longer. Some 500, 600 or 700 years ago in Europe actors were considered to be gypsies and to be a class of people just barely above robbers, highway men, thugs and thieves. Even then when bands of actors and entertainers came to villages and towns across western Europe everyone turned out because it was something that brought together the spirit of the community, that made people able to face their lives which in those times were particularly terrible with a lighter heart, with a better feeling about themselves, and with an opportunity to learn something perhaps about another part of their own country, about a different country, whatever.

I do not think there is any question and I do not think there is anyone in this House who does not agree that the existence of a vibrant, active, creative artistic community is an absolute essential to the existence of a vibrant and creative Canada.