

# Porteous' reported ouster gives director chance to state case

At a press conference July 2, Canada Council director Timothy Porteous charged that his appointment was being terminated by the Conservative government, adding that the principle of arm's-length arts funding was "in serious jeopardy." Porteous' surprise press-conference was held only days after Communications minister Marcel Masse had reaffirmed the principle of cultural agency autonomy. Both Masse and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney have denied Porteous was being fired. While no Order-in-Council has yet been issued officially terminating Porteous's appointment, active efforts are being made to find a new director. The following is the text of Porteous's statement.

OTTAWA — I have decided to use the occasion of the termination of my appointment as director of the Canada Council to speak directly to the arts community, to all those who practise, who enjoy and who support the arts in Canada. I am speaking out as director of the Council, as I believe I must, but the statement is my own, and it does not necessarily represent the views of the chairman of the board of the Council.

Over the past months I have become convinced that the long-established tradition of arts funding in Canada, a tradition admired and envied in many other countries, is in serious jeopardy. If present trends are allowed to continue, the Canada Council's leadership role in the arts will be permanently damaged or destroyed.

## The issue

The issue is a familiar one: should the public funds available to support the arts be distributed primarily according to artistic, or political criteria?

The Canadian tradition of arm's-length arts funding goes back to the Report of the Massey-Lévesque Commission which recommended the establishment of the Canada Council. It was confirmed in the Canada Council Act, in the recommendations of the Applebaum-Hébert Committee, in the exemption of the federal cultural agencies from Bill C-24, and, most recently, in the 1984 federal election campaign promises of all parties. During that election the Progressive Conservative Party stated: "We are committed without question to the arm's-length principle."

Yet what we have seen is a

constant erosion of that principle and a deliberate undermining of the federal cultural agencies. I will be speaking principally about the Canada Council but much of what I say is equally applicable to the National Museums Corporation, the National Arts Centre, the National Film Board and the CBC.

## The Council's board

The minister of Communications has consistently ignored the advice of the chairman of the Council (Maureen Forrester). She was not consulted about my dismissal. Her advice has not been sought about the desirable qualifications or the choice of a new director. Since September all of her suggestions for new Council members have been ignored. Between November and the end of June the minister did not meet with her to discuss the future of the Council or any other subject.

It is essential to the proper functioning of the Council that it should be governed by a board which is committed to advancing the interests of the arts, which is collectively qualified to deal with the issues which come before it, and which is seen as credible by the arts community

and the government. It should be, and has been in the past, the strongest arts board in Canada. The Applebaum-Hébert Committee recommended that "Appointments to the boards of directors of cultural agencies should be made with an overriding concern for the appointees' experience in the field of concern of the agency and their demonstrated broad-ranging interest in cultural matter."

If it wishes the Council or the other arts agencies to function as they should, the government must keep this recommendation in mind when making appointments and renewing the terms of members.

## Funding

For the last ten years the Canada Council's parliamentary appropriation has been declining in real value. This decline has occurred at a time when the arts in Canada have been rapidly expanding. The number of artists and arts organizations eligible to receive support from the Council has grown by at least 50%. As a result, the real value of the support which the Council provides to artists and arts organizations has been in constant decline. This trend was accelerated by the reduction in the Council's

current appropriation. For the first time in its history, the Council has fewer dollars to support the arts this year than it had last year.

As a consequence the Council has had to reduce its operating grants to many well-established and deserving arts organizations. Some of the larger organizations have complained to the minister and requested direct, supplementary, operating grants. The minister is said to be considering taking over responsibility for certain operating grants. If additional funds are available for operating grants, they should be distributed in accordance with the Canada Council's criteria of artistic quality, service to audiences, and financial needs.

The real issue is not a cut-back in arts funding. It is how the cuts have been applied. At the same time as the budgets of the arts agencies have been cut back or frozen, the arts funds which are directly controlled by the minister have been increased. These funds are mostly spent on capital or equipment grants or on one-shot project grants. In many cases the grants, which have ranged up to several million dollars, have been awarded with lit-

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## NDP announces arts and culture policy

OTTAWA – The federal New Democratic Party has produced a new policy for arts and culture in Canada. The new policy, spearheaded by NDP cultural affairs critic Lynn McDonald (MP – Broadview-Greenwood), was adopted at the NDP national convention during the July 1 week-end, after lengthy study.

Adoption of the new policy coincides with the July 2 controversy around the 'firing' of director Timothy Porteous Canada Council by the Conservative government. It also serves as a criticism of what McDonald terms "the intention of Mulroney and the Conservatives to politicize the arts in Canada."

"The erosion of Canadian policy on the arts had already begun under the Liberal government," McDonald told Cinema Canada. "Their support of Canada's cultural institutions did not grow at the same rate as the cost of living. Mulroney and the Conservatives are even worse than the Liberals. They are not supportive of the country's cultural institutions. The \$85 million CBC cut-back is an example of their attitude. Their economic approach is just not logical in regards to culture. Our dependency on the U.S. is just not pro-

fitable for the proliferation of our own indigenous culture."

The new cultural policy, continued McDonald, "is part of an effort by the NDP to put a stronger emphasis on cultural issues. No one had really put together all the NDP's views on art and culture in an official party policy. Having been sensitized by the Conservative government's attitude, we felt that it was important to do so now."

The NDP policy is based on the view that access to cultural activities should be open to all Canadians, regardless of revenue, and publicly financed to insure "varied, regional, vibrant and truly Canadian artistic and cultural development." At the same time, the policy wants to further the cultural development of the private sector.

A key measure adopted by the NDP centres on enlarging the role of the CBC/Radio-Canada to make it the country's first cultural communication institution. This includes a long term plan to increase financing to up to 1.5% of the yearly budget, an increase in Canadian content in all sectors of programming, an increase in broadcast of independent productions, as well as progressive elimination of advertisements. The policy also stresses that there should be an increase in regional programming of all kinds while insuring an equitable representation of Canada's

unique cultural groups.

The NDP policy also states that Canada and Quebec constitute "two nations" in regards to cultural growth.

"We must understand that the CBC and Radio-Canada are run quite separately and represent as well as serve two distinct groups," McDonald explained. "Both groups must attend to their culture."

Another key point in the new policy is that the Canada Council be given sufficient funds to be able to support new and innovative cultural activities, as well as to continue the support of established organizations.

In regards to film, NDP policy includes encouragement of production and distribution of films truly reflective of life in Canada through increased support of the

National Film Board; co-productions between the NFB and independent filmmakers; increased support to independent film producers through government organizations such as Telefilm Canada, increased regionalization of film production and the promotion of Canadian productions in foreign markets.

## Porteous

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the consideration of their long-term effects. In most cases capital or equipment grants, even or small amounts, lead to increased operating costs. It makes little economic sense to distribute so many million dollars of capital grants at the very time when operating grants are being cut back.

### What the government should do

- The government should unequivocally confirm its election promise to respect the arm's-length principle in arts funding.
- The government should clearly state its commitment to the Canada Council's role as its "primary instrument of support to the arts" and its confidence in the Council's Chairman and board.

- The government should select arts board members from among those who have established reputations in arts activities, investment or other fields related to the operations of the agency.

- As a priority of its arts policy the government should reverse the ten-year decline in the real value of the Council's appropriation, and restore the appropriation to a level which would enable the Council to respond to the real needs of the arts in the 1980s.

- The government should re-examine the current balance between the funds used for capital and equipment grants and those available for operating grants. Operating grants should be increased at a rate consistent with the increased operating costs incurred as a result of capital and equipment grants.

### What the arts community should do

- All those who share my concern about the future of the

Canada Council and of arts funding in this country should make their views known to the Prime Minister and to all members of Parliament. The arts community has shown, over the past year, that it can make its voice heard on important issues which affect it. The Prime Minister has demonstrated that he pays attention to public opinion when it is strongly expressed. The arts community's views should be given as much weight in the formulation of government policy as those of any comparable group.

It has been the great privilege of my life to serve as associate director, and for the last three years as director, of the Canada Council. I would like to thank all those at the Council and in the arts community who have supported me through some difficult but rewarding times. I hope that, in future years, I will be able to continue to serve the arts in Canada.

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