

End The State Subsidization of Canadian Culture

by

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Canada's policy of State intervention into culture creates a distorted market and hampers the the development of a culture by substituting an artificial sanctioned culture that fits an ideal rather than allowing culture and art to develop freely.

By subsidizing a bureaucratically conceived conception of Canadian culture and imposing limits on the import of cultural fare from the U.S., the market, rather than devoting resources to providing what the consumer demands, is forced into wasteful expenditures to comply with the regulations while at the same time filling the demand for the unsanctioned product.

"It is often said that other governments have long subsidized the arts. True, but as Jonathan Yardley, book critic for the Washington Post, points out, the examples usually cited are of autocratic, even tyrannical governments. Do we really want our government to emulate the Roman Empire, or the Medicis, or Louis XIV?"[1]

The State, in order to create this artificial culture, taxes the private sector and the taxpayer. The money is then given over to the State broadcaster and several officially sanctioned councils who have final say over the definition of Canadian Culture. This leads to political interference in the arts and cultural field as those who pander to the State's interpretation of culture are given grants and subsidies by the councils and those who cater to the market are denied air time and face punitive taxation by the regulatory commissions.

Artificially created Cultures

An example of this is the music industry. For a recording to be deemed Canadian and therefore worthy of tax credits and official status, the artist must be Canadian, and must have recorded the work in Canada and used a certain percentage of Canadian technical people and backup musicians.

Under this set of rules, a Canadian musician could record a song paying tribute to something as intrinsically Canadian as the Canadian Shield, but if for career reasons or tax reason, the person has the recording produced in a U.S. studio, it would not be Canadian Culture. By the same set of rules, a Canadian artist could produce a recording of Star Spangled Banner, and have it approved as Canadian Culture, so long as it was recorded in Canada.

Further confusing the issue, is the State's insistence on

multiculturalism. One would imagine that since Canada is a multi-cultural nation, then the U.S. material would be welcome. BUT, it is not. Under the convoluted definition of what is multi-cultural, a Trinidadian steel drum bands becomes legitimate culture in Canada while an American folk song about the struggle between farmer and the land is not, despite the fact that the average farmer in Saskatchewan can probably identify closer with the American folk song than he can with the Trinidadian steel drum.

In that marvellous British television show, "Yes, Minister," Sir Humphrey Appleby once said, "Subsidy is for art, for culture. It is not to be given to what the people want. It is for what the people don't want but ought to have. If they want something, they'll pay for it themselves."

A perfect illustration of how the bureaucratic mind thinks.

Culture becomes a propaganda tool for the State

The heavy-handed intervention by the State into culture in Canada, has made culture and the arts, historically a political tool of propaganda, into a immensely powerful government controlled propaganda machine. By subsidizing artists who are defenders of statism, the government can produce material designed to influence future generations. An example of this can easily be discerned by observance of children's programming on the State-owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The shows that are designed for children are all based on the theme of cooperative efforts and the need to subjugate the individual for the collective.

"It is precisely because art has power, because it deals with basic human truths, that it must be kept separate from government. Government, as I noted earlier, involves the organization of coercion. In a free society coercion should be reserved only for such essential functions of government as protecting rights and punishing criminals. People should not be forced to contribute money to artistic endeavours that they may not approve, nor should artists be forced to trim their sails to meet government standards."[1]

That the statisticians have found a home in a government controlled and funded production combine is not to be considered remarkable. It would be astonishing if they were not there. The results can be seen in the type of documentaries that are produced through the agency of the National Film Board and shown on the State Television network. Virtually every documentary is slanted to reflect the views of the socialist camp. I cannot recall ever seeing a CBC or NFB production that stressed the virtues of free enterprise or individualism.

Propaganda at the Taxpayer's expense

The taxpayer funds these programs, and the institutions and agencies that produce and sanction the propaganda material. Privately owned cable companies have taxes that are used to subsidize their state-run competition. Along with subsidizing through taxation, the Canadian Radio and Television Commission

regulates what is allowed to be broadcast and even what stations are allowed to be carried on the private cable systems. Market demands are overridden by order of the CRTC which has set quotas of Canadian Content and has the power to order that certain Canadian programs and stations are carried by the private cable operator at the expense of foreign (meaning U.S.) stations. Even if the market demands to see a certain U.S. network or station, the CRTC can order the cable operator to drop that highly demanded station and substitute a Canadian station. All Canadian station must be available on basic service, meaning that those who wish to view alternative fare must pay a premium.

Despite having funding guaranteed through the taxation of its competitors and having money directed to it from the government's general revenue pool, the State-owned CBC habitually loses money each year. A recent commission report has recommended that phone and cable users be subjected to an additional tax to raise money for the government propaganda organ.

Government discourages private sector funding of the arts

At a time when the State is bemoaning the lack of money available for the public funding of the arts, they have enacted legislation that prohibits companies that formerly funded the arts through donations from being associated with the arts. These companies, notably the tobacco companies, have been forbidden to have their names linked to cultural or artistic events or performances. At one time, companies such as Du Maurier, sponsored many classical music performances, yet now because they produce the politically evil cigarette, they are not permitted to be associated with those performances. Who suffers? The performers, the potential audience, and the public treasury which is now called upon to replace that which was formerly available from private sources.

Would a Free Market in Arts protect Canadian Culture?

That is the question that is asked by our fervent nationalists. It is the wrong question. The question should be... is there a true Canadian Culture to protect... and does it need protection? If people care and are interested in a form of art, they will support it through buying tickets to the performance and/or buying recorded performances. If they do not, then the artform will either die out or become a small regionalized artform. Neither of those possibilities justifies the forced taxation of the consumer. Let the consumer decide for himself what he wants to support and allow him to keep the money with which to make that choice.

Why were the arts formerly able to be supported by the private sector business community and the private citizen and not today? Taxation. This is admitted by the state and the present Liberal Party that is in power, which has contemplated tax relief for contributions to the arts.

"there is a clear case for reform of taxation so that it is far easier (as in the United States) for individuals and businesses to support cultural activity" and concludes that "we would be conforming to the maxim that, "where the goal is to encourage some kind of desirable development or activity which is felt that the

market underproduces, this is best achieved by tax relief rather than by direct subsidies", which inevitably concentrate discretionary authority in quasi-governmental organizations."[2]

Thus a case is made for elimination of taxation and a return to private funding for the arts. For if there is no taxation, there is no need to return money to the citizenry for them to support the arts. They would have their own choice of what arts to support and how much they wish to spend on that support.

Sources

[1] Remarks of David Boaz, Executive Vice President Cato Institute, prepared for delivery at the Delaware Center for Contemporary Arts May 3, 1995

[2] John Gray, Limited Government: A Positive Agenda

Created: Tuesday, February 13, 1996