

CANADIAN CULTURAL POLICY IN A WORLD CONTEXT

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The government of Canada has made some suggestions that it is interested in ensuring special treatment for culture in the context of trade agreements. The Minister of Heritage has suggested that there should be an international "instrument" that would protect cultural diversity (known in discussion terms as the General Agreement on Trade in Culture or GATC, or that there should be a "cultural exemption" in other WTO treaties. So far, however, Canada does not seem to have come forward with any detailed proposals.

On most matters, Canada has been an vigorous proponent of free trade. Indeed, in the last fifteen years, Canada has possibly been the most active state in the entire world with respect to promoting liberalized and free trade through formal international agreements. Canada plays an active role in promoting trade at the World Trade Organization. It has sought and obtained the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (CUSFTA) within the United States, then joined with Mexico in forming the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Recently, it has entered into agreements with Israel (the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement or CIFTA), Chile (the Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement or CCFTA) and Costa Rica (Canada-Costa Rica Free Trade Agreement or CCRFTA). Now it is engaged in negotiating a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). At the same time, it is participating in negotiations to form a "Pacific Rim" trade area. It has also attempted to interest the European Union into entering into another bilateral free trade agreement.

When it comes to culture, however, Canada has tried to preserve some room for protectionist measures. With the CIFTA and the CCFTA, cultural industries are not mentioned. When it negotiated the CUSFTA with the United States, Canada claimed it had won a wide exemption for "cultural industries." But there was actually less to the "victory" than might first appear. The deal said it was lawful for Canada to protect its cultural industries. But if Canada engaged in a measure that would otherwise be contrary to the free trade deal, the United States had the treaty right to retaliate with measures of "equivalent commercial effect." In other words,

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“you have the perfect right to do what you want, and we have the perfect right to slap you if you do.” This flimsy “shield” for cultural protectionism was carried forward into NAFTA.

Under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), signatory countries are invited to list in a schedule those sectors to which basic WTO norms, such as “national treatment”, will apply. Canada has refrained from adding to the list some of its cultural industries, such as audiovisual services. There has also been much debate as to whether cultural industries should be covered under GATS at all. Among the major voices in this debate are Canada and the European Union on the side of including cultural industries in the GATS or to be covered in an agreement of its own (often referred to as a General Agreement on Trade in Culture or GATC), and on the other side, the United States, who want them to fall under the GATT.

Canada has fought and lost several battles in front of World Trade Organization (WTO) panels over its protectionist measures. The biggest being “Canada - Certain Measures Concerning Periodicals”. What brought this ruling about was that Canada had adopted measures aimed at excluding or discriminating against “split run” magazines. The undesired material consisted of imported magazines which contained the usual editorial content, but geared their advertising specifically to Canadian audiences. Canadian policy makers considered that “split run” magazines were too threatening to the position in the marketplace of their Canadian competitors. The Minister of Heritage, Sheila Copps, has commented that the kind of “cultural instrument” she favours might have enabled her to win some of those lost battles.

Canada considered a variety of fallback measures. It even considered making it a criminal offence for a Canadian business or organization to place an ad in a split-run magazine. Finally, Canada resorted to flat-out subsidies for production of magazines in Canada - a course of action which appears to be consistent with the GATT. The latter expressly permits subsidies for domestic production.

While Canada has at times spoken in favour of measures to protect culture, this year it has announced a multimillion dollar program to promote culture exports. Under the “Tomorrow Starts Today” program, \$32 million will be allotted over three years to help Canadian businesses export their cultural products. Ironically, in the government fact sheet on the program, the impact these exports have on the Canadian economy is stressed, as is the desire of the Canadian government to have these products in as many foreign markets as possible, with the United States and Europe singled out as the largest export markets. Canadian policy makers ought reasonably to recognize that there will potentially be “blowback”

to promoting cultural protectionism at home and rampant intrusion abroad. It might provide legal or political legitimacy for measures by other states to keep out cultural material that is produced in Canada.

Within Canada, there is the usual debate over government intervention on cultural issues. An influential think-tank, the C.D. Howe Institute, has produced a report showing that subsidies for culture tend to produce less economic benefit than their supporters have touted. It is never easy to develop a coherent set of governmental policies with respect to Canadian culture. There is no philosophical or political consensus within this country about the goals we have as a society or the role of the Canadian government in promoting them.

What is the "society" whose culture ought to be promoted by governmental intervention? Is there - or can there be - a distinctive pan-Canadian cultural identity? Or is the country too big and diverse for that? Does the country consist of two nations - one French-speaking, the other English? Or is there a distinctive Quebec nation and then the rest of Canada? Are we bilingual, but multicultural? Do aboriginal peoples constitute a whole other set of nations that should have a distinctive place in cultural policies?

If we knew what we wanted governments to accomplish, what would be the best vehicle? Subsidies for cultural creators? Quotas on how much time or space in various media should be allocated to "Canadian content"? Ownership rules requiring that producers be Canadian?

Which governments - federal, provincial, municipal, aboriginal ought to have what role in promoting culture? Should policy creation or administration be left to independent agencies of government, or made by politically accountable officials?

To what extent should our approach to culture be influenced by the impact of our decisions on our international trade relations? On our international trade obligations? On the kind of example we are setting for the rest of the world?

The issues involved are varied, numerous and difficult to resolve individually, let alone collectively. This essay will try to contribute some focus to the debate by proposing a set of principles that might be the overall approach to policy in this area. Whether accepted or not, it is hoped that they might help to provide some focus to a much-needed public debate.

I. Canadian Policy Makers Should Keep in Mind Canada's Place in the World as a Whole, and That Canada Ought to be a Model of Openness, Not Protectionism

We tend to make cultural policy in response to a perceived threat of being overwhelmed by the mass culture of the United States, but the measures we take domestically and the movements we propose internationally can influence the demands and conduct of other states.

Canada is known for a long tradition of democracy, and a more recent but determined commitment to protecting fundamental human rights, including freedom of individual expression. If we say that it is right and lawful for governments to exclude "foreign" cultural influences, including that of the United States, we are encouraging other states to do so. That includes the many states in the world who are authoritarian or closed societies. Their claim will be "if Canada must resort to such measures, we especially must."

Why "especially"? Canada is richer than most countries. If our producers and consumers of culture need to be shielded from the economic power of U.S. producers, then so, a fortiori, do producers in most other countries.

The approach being urged here might be challenged on the basis that it supposes that it would be a good thing for societies across the world to be exposed to U.S. cultural products.

I do believe that.

I believe that if people throughout the world have the opportunity to view U.S. movies and television and internet broadcasts, they will see that the United States is a prosperous society, that it embraces individuals of different ethnicity and religion, and that it allows a wide variety of viewpoints to be expressed.

Exposure to U.S. culture will indeed show that many Americans are hedonistic, uninterested in the life of the mind or of the spirit, and ignorant about life on the rest of the planet. But it will also tend to show that most Americans are benign. Many of them may be interested foremost in sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll, but that means they are also not primarily interested in inflicting suffering on the rest of the world or achieving world conquest.

If that message were all that U.S. culture exports conveyed, they would still help to make a more peaceful and democratic world. It was exposure to western television, radio, and records that helped to convince the younger generation in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe that their societies and governments should join the world of democratic and mar-

ket-oriented societies. It helped to break down the distrust and hostility between the western democracies and the Soviet block. It conveyed some of the societal benefits that come from political and economic freedom. In the long run, the same positive effect is likely in other societies, such as China and Iran as they are exposed to western cultural products - which are mostly American or influenced by Americans.

Some "mainstream" material actually has lasting artistic and spiritual value; for example, some "Hollywood" directors, past and present, from John Ford to Francis Ford Coppola, are recognized as significant artists. Even material that will not stand the test of time can provide moments of enjoyment or distraction. It may also provide a shared focus of interest for people in many different countries - which in itself can help to build connections and understandings among people in widely different societies. A commitment to individual freedom requires that governments allow people to decide for themselves what values they seek and who to share them with.

Various technologies - cable and satellite television, the internet, CD-ROM and DVD burners - have made it possible for more producers than ever to create cultural products and access audiences. U.S. cultural exports emerge from a vast and diverse range of artists who come from practically all ethnic backgrounds. The pursuit of "cultural diversity" is an ironic reason for governments of other countries to try to stem the inflow of U.S. cultural products.

Half a year after the September 11 attack on the United States, polls have found that there are societies in which a majority of the people deny that the bombers were from Islamic countries. There is widespread belief in absurd and hate-filled conspiracy theories, such as the involvement of Israeli intelligence agencies. This is a world that remains desperately short of mutual understanding. Canada ought to be leading the way in promoting the exchange of cultural products among all nations. It should not be a state whose example includes considering the imposition of criminal penalties on advertisers whose "offence" is placing an ad in an innocuous split-run magazine.

II. The Canadian Government's Cultural Policies Should Be Setting an Example of Openness For Other Jurisdictions Within Canada.

Governments of Quebec have adopted a variety of measures to protect the language and culture associated with traditional Quebec society. Some of the measures have been unduly restrictive and heavy-handed. For example, until recently, Quebec governments attempt-

ed to limit the extent to which English was taught as a second language to Francophone children in public schools. As Lucien Bouchard - himself a separatist Premier of Quebec has pointed out - the elite in Quebec recognized the value to an individual of knowing both languages, and sent their children to private schools where they acquired both.

Aboriginal communities are acquiring enhanced powers of self-government. Some of them face profound issues of cultural loss; a number of aboriginal languages are in danger of dying out altogether. Talented individuals within traditional aboriginal communities often leave for the cities. There may be a temptation among some aboriginal leaders to believe that part of the solution is to build up walls against other cultures. The path that ought to be followed is to educate aboriginal children so that they can thrive in both worlds. They should be fully educated about their own traditions and languages, and at the same time fully enabled to choose, if they wish, to succeed in "mainstream" society.

A similar point could be made about the example the government of Canada sets for "multicultural" groups in our society. Some groups operate a variety of private institutions, including schools. They are threatened with "assimilation" into mainstream Canadian culture. The government of Canada ought to be thinking very carefully about the example it is setting when it traffics in cultural protectionism of any sort.

III. Cultural Policy in Canada Should Be About "Building Up", Not "Keeping Out"

The aim of a cultural policy should be in all respects positive: to encourage and support the creation of cultural products and to help audiences to understand and appreciate them. The government of Canada can properly consider subsidizing creative activity that achieves legitimate Canadian goals. It can create and support institutions like the Canadian broadcasting system. It can provide money and suggestions that will help schools and universities to expose Canadians to Canadian cultural products and give them some ideas on how these products can be understood and evaluated. What the government of Canada should scrupulously avoid is preventing or hampering the ability of Canadians to access whatever foreign cultural products they see fit.

Placing restrictions on the ability of Canadians to access foreign cultural material is inconsistent with the basic principle of a free society: that individuals are free to seek out and define their own ends in life. The end of government is to provide a structure that maximizes the freedom and practical ability of citizens to live life as they see fit. Individuals do not exist to serve the state. For some Canadians, the ability to engage with cultural materials and communities outside of Canada will be an

important aspect of self-development and fulfilment.

The practical impact of such efforts tend to be highly elitist. The powerful define what foreign products a citizen can freely engage with. Books are freely available, but television and radio are subject to Canadian content ("Can Con") rules. The impact of these rules is then most severely felt for those who do not have the money or sophistication to avoid them. Anyone who can afford cable television or a satellite dish will not be unduly troubled by the requirement that local stations have a large measure of "Canadian content" in their programming. Those who access their news or music via the internet are not going to be troubled by domestic content requirements on local radio stations.

In life generally, competition can bring out the best in us. The challenge encourages us to work harder, be more creative. The same holds in cultural activities. Shielding an industry from competition is likely to encourage mediocrity. To the extent that artists and Canadian governments must produce products that win an audience, both are encouraged to find ways to produce a range of material that will win adherents through its power to edify or to entertain.

If Canada wants to promote cultural activity, the proper course is to engage in constructive activities to build up both those who engage in creative activity and those who have the potential to appreciate it.

The "building up" approach, happily enough, is the one that is most consistent with international trade rules. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) permits subsidies for local production. It does not permit import quotas or discriminatory treatment of foreign imports once they arrive within Canada. The building up approach is likely to steer Canada clear of confrontations with its trading partners, and to minimize the extent to which Canada undermines the world trade regime. Few countries are more dependent than Canada on regimented administration of the rules of international trade law. Our main battles are with entities - the United States, Japan, the European Union, China - which have more economic and political clout than we do. A system based on respect for rules, not power, is one that suits our long term interests the best.

IV. Major Elements of "Building Up" Must Include Educating Audiences as Well as Artists, Moving Away from Funding Only Elite Artists, And Fostering Mass Participation in Creative Activity.

Masures may include better education in both performing and appreciating cultural activity in the schools and universities. The long term thriving of cultural activity in Canada depends first and

foremost on creating a society in which a large proportion of society is able to create, and an even larger portion is aware of what is being done and educated in how to evaluate and appreciate it.

The federal government's role in primary and secondary education is limited. It has traditionally played a large role in educational funding at the university level. But the federal government, without intruding on provincial authority, could play a useful role in coordinating and inspiring provincial efforts to produce a culturally educated society.

"Educated" means ideally that Canadians are exposed to a wide range of media and to diverse products within them. Someone with a "musical education" should be able to understand the subtlety, complexity, and quasi-mathematical elegance of classical music. But they should also be able to hear popular music - rock n' roll, rap, pop - and have some sense of how it can be understood and evaluated. We should be training citizens who are able to look at various cultural activities from a variety of perspectives. What are the components of this genre? Does it adopt a rigid set of rules, or are there few conventions that are routinely followed? What do conventions say about the background or objectives of the artists? Do works in the genre aim at the emotions, at the spirit or at the mind? Do artists seem to follow the free movement of their creative impulses and thoughts, or do they seem to adapt themselves more to audience expectations? How much planning and calculation seem to go into a work? How much spontaneity? Does this material try to preach a particular message? Or does it present a variety of different characters and perspectives, and leave the audience to make its own ethical judgments?

The focus of education should not only be to produce a mass audience of perceptive listeners, but as many as possible who are interested in creating themselves. Our society tends to place too much emphasis on being a spectator for the best rather than being active participants ourselves. A sports policy ought first and foremost to be aimed at encouraging people to play, not watch.

All of this assumes that the ability of citizens to create and enjoy culture is something in which the state should take an interest. Every dollar that a government spends on culture is a dollar taken away from other needed activities, like operating hospitals or building roads. Why should the state in a free society take any interest in culture at all?

The extent to which a society devotes scarce public resources to the promotion of culture is always a legitimate question. Reasonable people can legitimately suggest different answers. Much depends on the amount of resources available and the urgency of other needs. But some public support for cultural activity as such (as opposed to merely being one aspect of industrial policy) seems to be at least a permissible option in a

free society.

If the most fundamental premise of a society is the respect of individual freedom, it does seem reasonable that a society would aim at more than avoiding restrictions on choice. It might reasonably spend some resources on maximizing the range of options open to citizens. In a culturally lively and diverse society, the chances are increased that a citizen will have the opportunity to experience some material that is of abiding interest to him. The ability to find fulfillment from that cultural experience can often be enhanced by an education that permits a citizen to compare that experience with others, and to understand some of the technical and artistic subtleties involved.

Our society is not only free, but democratic. We are all engaged in the exercise of deciding many issues not only for ourselves, but for others. The kind of public choices we make can be influenced by the values, ideas, and emotions that are contained in a wide variety of cultural material - and not merely the overtly political. Cultural expression may send various messages about what is important for ourselves and others. Citizens should be able to look at those messages with some insight, rather than being impulsively or unconsciously swayed by them.

Citizens should have some understanding of the lives and values of their fellow citizens. Self-governance is best exercised by a population that understands and tolerates each other. Cultural activities can help to build this knowledge. With an appreciation of the lives and values of others usually comes an enhanced measure of tolerance or even affection and admiration. I say "usually" because there will also be some people who will be intolerant regardless of the information they are presented with. And sometimes those who are inclined to sympathy and tolerance will discover that other human beings or cultures actually contain elements that are unappealing. At the very least, an understanding of the culture of others should help in the process of seeing that there can be redeeming values even in cultures that have their weaknesses, and that every group contains a diverse group of individuals, many of whom deserve to be valued in their own right.

History suggests that exposure to "high culture" does not in itself produce citizens who are tolerant, or even possessed of elementary moral decency. The ranks of professional intellectuals - professors, journalists, musicians, novelists, poets - have often included in their ranks individuals who have been cruel and ignorant in matters both personal and political. The rise of Hitler was supported, and often actively aided and abetted by many within Germany's intellectual class.

Intellectuals actually have a special vulnerability to cruel and fanatical ideas. A life of philosophizing about concepts and symbols can leave one insulated from human realities. Intellectuals are liable to become

enthusiasts of abstract ideas without an adequate appreciation of the nature of other human beings, the diversity of society, or the difficulties and unintended consequences of putting ideas into practice.

The process of genuinely educating prospective "intellectuals", as well as citizens in general, should include exposing them to a broad and diverse range of cultural material. While that may not in itself be sufficient to produce decent human beings, it should help. German intellectuals who were enthusiasts of the high culture icon Richard Wagner would have benefited from knowing more about both the high and folk culture of the Jews, Gypsies and gays and lesbians who lived within their society. Indeed, the whole society could have desperately benefited from a broader education in this regard.

Let me be clear that while I think that exposure to "high culture" is not in itself sufficient to produce decent citizens, it can be a valuable part of the process. The study of high literature, for example, encourages us to become attentive to the precise ways in which language can be used to inform, express, or manipulate. These are valuable qualities for citizens to know. That same study can also help us to see how complex human beings are; how a human being can be driven by a variety of conflicting ideas and emotions. It can help us to understand how people who are mostly good can perceive and react to situations in drastically different and conflicting ways. These are things we should rightly know in attempting to govern ourselves.

V. "Building Up" Should Not Involve Government Measures to Displace Foreign Material with Canadian Material. If There is a Problem of Access to the Market, It Should Be Resolved By "Adding Shelf Space", Not Rationing It Along Nationalistic Lines.

Canada has in some sectors - radio, and television in particular - adopted "Canadian content" rules. This means that Canadian broadcasters must include in their program a specified quota of Canadian material. For example, commercial radio stations must devote 35% of their air time between 6 am and 6 pm to Canadian songs Monday through Friday. A "Canadian" song is one where a Canadian must be principally responsible for two of the following aspects of the recording; composing the music, writing the lyrics, performing the song, or a song that was produced in Canada. Canadian commercial television stations must devote 60% of their air time between 6 am and midnight to Canadian shows, and at least 50% of their air time between the hours of 6 pm and midnight. The criteria of "Canadian" shows is also decided by

a complicated bureaucratic formula.

The argument for this policy has been that Canadian material should be given a fair chance to access the marketplace. If the matter were left to private distributors, it is argued, Canadian material might never gain exposure.

Even if there were some truth to the assumption that Canadian distributors might not be inclined to "air" Canadian material, the appropriate response, in light of the "building up" principle, would for government to take measures that add time and space for Canadian content rather than ordering the displacement of foreign content. There are very few situations in which technology requires that "shelf space" or "air time" be rationed. With cable television, for example, it is easy to add more channels. There is plenty of room in Canadian radio wavebands to add more stations. When Canadian regulators tried to keep out an American country music station from the cable menu offered to consumers, it was not because it was technologically impossible to have both a Canadian and American stations. It was because it was thought impossible that two stations could both be economically viable. But the government of Canada always had the option of subsidizing the operation of an all-Canadian channels.

It is doubtful, moreover, whether "Canadian content" rules are actually necessary, if they ever were, in order for Canadian content to gain access to the market. Distributors in Canada of Canadian books and magazines stock Canadian content in abundance without being ordered to do so by government. Canadian music is likely to be aired by at least some radio stations because Canadian bands tend to focus on touring within Canada, and thereby building up the market for radio play.

VI. The Promotion of "Canadian Culture" in Most Areas Should Not Be Based on Any Pre-Conceived Notion of What Kind of Messages or Topics Are Quintessentially "Canadian".

For most purposes, the definition of Canadian culture should be something that is produced within Canada or by Canadians, or that is about what happens in Canada or what is done by Canadians.

The authenticity and value of the cultural interchange among Canadians will best be served by activity that reflects the creative choice of artists and the preferences of audiences, rather than being skewed by government funders. In most areas it is futile, as well as authoritarian, for Canadian authorities to try to determine what activities are definitionally "Canadian". The bag of stereotypical settings and subjects of

Canadian activities contains a small number of objects, many of which are already overused. If government encourages artists and audiences to explore the subjects of their choice, what will emerge will reveal much about who we actually are. If Canadians started writing science fiction in large numbers, we might discover some tendencies that differentiate it from its American counterparts. There might be fewer "save the universe" action heroes, for example, and more figures who are hesitant and lacking in self-confidence. More stories might be told from the periphery of the galactic empire than from its capital. Or perhaps not. We might discover from various activities that there is not much a distinctively "Canadian voice" that distinguished it from that of the United States. That might reveal something to ourselves about the extent to which we have become culturally integrated with the United States, and we might adjust our thinking and policies accordingly.

To the extent that Canadian governments attempt to shape a Canadian cultural identity, the major focus should be on producing a society that is sophisticated, cosmopolitan, and diverse. We might in the end distinguish ourselves from American society partly by producing a citizenry that is even more cosmopolitan than theirs. But Canada (notwithstanding its self-delusions) is like many other countries in hosting a wide variety of cultures. If, at the end of the day, Canadian is home to a society that is culturally rich, but not especially distinct from some other countries, that would be a satisfactory result.

VII. The Canadian Government Can Reasonably Identify Some Areas of Cultural Activity That Are Genuinely and Distinctly "Canadian". However, These Principally Involve The History And Practice of Canadian Politics And Government.

As long as Canada remains a distinct political entity, there will be a sphere of governmental activity that is uniquely ours. For this democratic system to work properly, we need citizens who understand Canadian political history (and the social history that produced it) and who understand the workings of our political system. The government of Canada has a legitimate role in working with the provinces in promoting education in history and "civics". It also should be overcoming any private sector deficit in the amount of news, commentary, and criticism that accompanies the working of our political system.

We have a somewhat dysfunctional political system at present in which the governing elite has altogether too much power. The political party with a majority of seats in the parliament or legislature (which is

usually acquired by obtaining far less than half the popular vote) wields near absolute power for up to five years at a time.

Some checks and balances are provided by the judiciary, which now wields considerable power with respect to the interpretation of the Charter of Rights. The activities of this unelected branch of government, however, are not well understood or criticized in the popular media. Canada needs a highly active "fourth estate" - an active and independent-minded media - to provide much of the analysis, criticism, and fresh ideas that would ordinarily emerge from within the political system. The national broadcasting system, the CBC, has played a valuable role with respect to investigative journalism, news reporting, and commentary. The cost of its public affairs budget is a tiny fraction of the overall cost of government in Canada. That fraction should be compared to the amount of public money spent each year by the government itself on press releases, advertising, and funding other communicative activities.

The public affairs activities of the CBC should be better insulated from financial retaliation by governments who find its reporting embarrassing. Ideally, its year-to-year funding would not be a matter of government discretion. Rather, there would be an endowment fund set up, or at least a statute that stipulated a funding level for a set period of time, perhaps ten years.

It might be possible to find reasonable alternatives to the CBC. Perhaps it would be possible to take the public affairs budget it currently spends and allocate it to private sector broadcasters for public affairs broadcasting. One should not overlook, however, the extent to which the CBC has a corporate culture that takes public affairs seriously, and has a sense of mission to do it properly. It may not be easy to fully replicate that commitment in the private sector.

Another aspect of Canadian public life that is culturally and legally entrenched is that the federal government is officially bilingual. To fully participate in politics or bureaucracy at the highest levels, Canadians must be able to operate comfortably in both languages. The "talent pool" available for the top jobs in this country has been severely restricted by the limited number of individuals who possess the necessary language skills plus the necessary talent and interest. Canadians who wonder why they are dissatisfied with their range of options for Prime Minister might wish to consider the impact of this "language barrier."

Official bilingualism flows from the historical fact, and the current social reality, that there are two predominant language groups in Canada. Social understanding, as well as full participation in public office, requires that more Canadians be able to directly communicate and listen to voices from the other side of the linguistic divide. It continues to be a legitimate aim of the federal government, therefore, to work with the

provinces to maximize the opportunities for Canadians to acquire a facility with both official languages.

Aboriginal governments are acquiring increasing powers and responsibilities in this country. Federal efforts to enable both aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians to understand an aboriginal language and culture would also be an area in which the federal government could legitimately place a special emphasis.

VIII. The "Industrial" Aspects of Cultural Policy Should Be Assessed By The Same Standards As Other Economically-Oriented Programs. Monitoring Should Not Be Left To The Politicians And Bureaucrats Responsible For Culture.

Government measures generally have multiple purposes. Support for the arts may have a variety of proffered or real justifications. Some of them involve values that are difficult to fully measure and quantify. One of the justifications that Canada offers when it supports cultural activity is that there are valuable economic spin-offs.

Canadian governments have not performed consistently well in monitoring the economic costs and benefits of straight-out economic development programs. The federal government has to acknowledge in recent times that a job creation program operated by Human Resources Development Canada - to the tune of about a billion dollars a year - did not even adequately define and enforce rules respecting grant applications.

To the extent that cultural programs are supported on partly economic grounds, there should be adequate attempts to dispassionately project and assess their overall impact. This task should not necessarily be delegated to the same politicians and bureaucrats who operate the cultural programs. They may favour the programs on the basis of unquantifiable values, and not be interested or skilled at assessing actual economic impacts.

An overall cost-benefit analysis must look at not only how many jobs are created in cultural industries, but the overall picture. That includes the economic impact of taking money out of the hands of taxpayers to pay for the programs. It may include a consideration of whether the same money could have been used to better effect in other job creation programs - such as funding the hiring of public sector workers in the bureaucracy or publicly-funded hospitals and educational institutions.

IX. Canadian Ownership Rules Should Never Be Seen As Having Value in Themselves. They Should Be Retained Only When They Are Shown To Be a Necessary Means to a Policy Objective. Those Existing Ownership Rules That Are Futile or Counterproductive Should Be Abandoned.

The fact that the economic owner of a cultural project or industry is a Canadian does not in itself mean that the product itself will have greater value for Canadians. A Canadian owner might be interested only in making as much money as possible, and not have any concern whatever in promoting Canadian artists or enhancing the public welfare. A foreign owner might, for financial reasons, affection for Canada or a genuine interest in the arts, bring to the market material that is highly entertaining or of enduring value. Conversely, if a foreign producer of cultural products does not cater to local interests, the Canadian market will tend to respond adversely.

Citizenship is easily bought by plutocrats. Rupert Murdoch overcame U.S. ownership rules by acquiring U.S. citizenship. It is questionable whether that conversion in any way altered the manner in which he approached questions of editorial content.

In many areas, there is not enough choice and competition for artists or consumers. There are no longer a sufficient variety of Canadian bookstore owners, for example. It would be better if Canada had more than one national news magazine. Canadian content rules can and do lead to oligopolies or monopolies that disserve the cause of building a vibrant and accessible cultural life for Canadians.

Canadian ownership rules can also be counterproductive to the extent that they prevent Canadian owners from expanding their presence in other countries. Canadian owners will tend to be more aware of the existence and value of Canadian cultural material, and may choose to market it abroad if foreign governments allow them to do so.

The counterproductive effect of Canadian content rule has been seen in other sectors. The cause of "national unity" is not served by having one predominant, Canadian-owned air carrier that is widely regarded as charging unreasonably high prices and whose operators and staff sometimes seem to display an attitude of indifference to what consumers actually want or feel. The foremost objective of airline policy should be to make it relatively easy for Canadians to travel throughout the country for business, social or familiar purposes. The current state of affairs is hampering that objective, and in turn, the cause of national unity.

X. Support For "Multicultural" Activities Should Generally Be Conducted By The Same Agencies That Support Culture Generally.

Support for "multiculturalism" in Canada at times amounts to politicians dispensing cheques so that they can win blocks of ethnic votes. The potential for real and perceived favouritism among different ethnic groups is substantial. The potential for disproportionately large spending on ethnic groups that are large and have well organized lobbies is even greater. There is no intrinsic reason why a troupe devoted to traditional dance is worthy of more or less support than one that is concerned with square dancing or disco. A more equitable distribution of public funds might be achieved in some contexts by administering multicultural funding through the same agencies and criteria as are used by other applicants for public support of the arts.

XI. There Should Be Diverse Means Of Accessing Public Support For The Arts. Funding Should Not Depend On Gaining the Favour of One Particular Federal Agency.

Support for cultural activity should not be vested in the hands of any single clique of politicians or arts functionaries. If a small group of elected officials make the choices, they will tend to be tainted by partisan objectives, personal connections, and personal tastes. If the choices are left to "blue ribbon" panels, the creative community will be at the mercy of individuals who may actually be more narrow minded and prone to personal favouritism than are politicians.

Public support can be provided by tax deductions or credits in which no public functionaries at all are involved. It can be funnelled through existing autonomous institutions, such as universities. If there are to be some agencies that make discretionary grants, there should be a variety of them. The federal government might create several, the provinces some others, the private sector still more.

XII. Public Support Should Be Aimed At Ensuring As Wide And Diverse Range Of Activities As Possible. "High Culture" Should Be Supported As one Part Of An Eclectic Approach

Government policy makers are not well equipped to determine what cultural products are, by virtue of their intrinsic merits, worthy of support. Indeed, few if any of us can confidently predict what history will judge as having exceptional and enduring artistic value. Opera used to be part of popular culture; its lasting value and shrinking audiences over time have now put it in the category of high culture. No one living in the rock'n'roll explosion of the fifties and sixties would have been confident that any of that music would stand the test of time, or that Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys would be seen as one of the most distinguished composers of his time. If there is an energetic and diverse cultural community, skills and taste will be developed that will eventually result in high quality art, and eventually it is likely to be recognized as such.

In any event, many will find enjoyment and edification in cultural activity that will never be recognized as having deep artistic merit. Government policy should not systematically excluded such efforts from their concern and support.

CONCLUSION

Canada ought not to be engaged in advancing the cause of cultural protectionism in international forums or through our domestic policies. We ought instead to be establishing a model of public cultural policy that is positive, forward looking and open-minded. A worthy purpose of government in any society is to help its citizens to become aware of their culture options, and to equip them to make free and informed choices about which ones best suit their individual search for meaning.

Within that liberal and cosmopolitan context, Canadian governments can usefully make special efforts to support activities in several areas, such as the study of Canadian history, that have a uniquely "Canadian" character. Another worthy end of government is to help its citizens understand their past, and their shared conditions today, in order to better exercise their power over each other in the context of democratic self-government.

Within a Canadian society that is culturally diverse, informed and vibrant, there will likely emerge a large amount of cultural expression in many areas that are distinctively Canadian. It is in most areas unnecessary and futile for politicians and bureaucrats to attempt to impose some pre-conceived notion of what kind of cultural activities are consistent with our unique national character. What emerges as a result of the free choices of artists and audiences will reveal much more truthfully what Canadian realities and aspirations actually are.

Even if were to turn out that the particular books and films and scores that are created in Canada generally do not seem as distinctively "Canadian" as some would like, the quality of Canadian cultural life – its freedom, diversity, honesty, energy and artistry – could in itself serve as a source of Canadian identity and pride.

In international forums, Canada should be encouraging the whole world to adopt a liberal and constructive approach to cultural policy. We should be exploring ways to develop the export opportunities created by an international trade system that promotes free trade in cultural products. But more than material self-interest is involved. We should be promoting openness as a matter of building a world order that is not only more prosperous, but more supportive of human freedom and of mutual understanding.

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