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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

ACTRA Presents at the Finance Committee Pre-budget Hearings



Dear Members:

Last Monday Gordon Pinsent and I went to Parliament Hill to testify at the federal Finance Committee's pre-budget hearings. We took a prominent place among a panel of speakers from the cultural community including those representing Canadian publishers, authors, periodical writers, and screenwriters.

Our message was simple: funding must be continued and enhanced in order to ensure that Canadian films and television dramas are to be available for Canadian audiences.

We challenged the government to commit to restoring and enhancing its contributions to the Canadian Television Fund, Telefilm and the CBC in the next federal budget. We told the Committee how our members have a vital stake in Canada's cultural future and how performers benefit when work opportunities are strong in the film and television industry.

It was a fast-paced event with the Finance Committee chair ruling the speaker's timetable with brutal efficiency. Nevertheless, we were called on again and again by Committee MPs to comment further on our issues. We used economic and cultural arguments to make our case. We pointed out that Canadian film and television is a \$5 billion dollar industry and while our industry needs government assistance it is also a very good investment; for every dollar the government invests in the film and television industry, six dollars is returned to our economy.

The Committee was visibly impressed by Gordon's eloquence and knowledge of our industry. Drawing on anecdotes from his career he told the Committee of some of his meetings with Canada's most famous politicians, illustrating the problem of under funding of our cultural industries particularly film and television.

Gordon rose to the occasion when challenged by a member of the Committee to make a case for increased and reliable funding to the arts. Gordon replied that a lack of consistency, a policy of 'stops and starts,' inhibits creativity among artists. He noted sadly that to make a production here we are always told to cut back and not to worry about creativity.

Gordon and I defended the role of the CRTC even though we are often critical of its decisions. In response to a question about the CRTC's efforts to limit choice, we turned the question around and told the whole story about the CRTC's 1999 Television Policy and its disastrous effect on Canadian content. There is no question that the CRTC's television policies need a major overhaul, but the Regulator has an essential role in protecting Canadian culture. It must promote choice and that means a choice of Canadian programming.

The pre-budget hearings are an opportunity for performers and other members of the cultural community to tell the finance committee what is needed from the government to ensure that Canadians will be able to see their own stories written directed and performed by Canadians. Who better to tell our stories than ourselves? All that's needed is the belief that we can do it and the financial support. With a nearly \$9 billion surplus this year ACTRA will, as a leader in the cultural community, continue to make itself heard on funding issues.

I would like to personally thank Gordon for generously rearranging his schedule and traveling to Ottawa to accompany me before the committee. Once again, he has done his fellow members a tremendous service and we are all grateful.



Thor Bishopric