

Canadian Advisory Committee on the Status of the Artist

On 31 January 1987, Canada's first Canadian Advisory Committee on the Status of the Artist was created by the Honourable Flora MacDonald, Minister of Communications. The mandate of this Committee is to inform and advise not only the Minister of Communications, but also the government as a whole on ways to improve the status of artists across the country.

The creation of the Canadian Advisory Committee on the Status of the Artist was a direct result of the recommendations put forward by the Task Force on the Status of the Artist, better known by the names of its co-chairpersons, Gratien Gélinas and Paul Siren. The Gélinas-Siren report, published in August 1986, emphasized the importance of having an internal federal government mechanism which would make members of Parliament and public servants aware of artists' concerns and needs and encourage changes to legislation and regulations to improve the status of artists.

During its November 1986 semi-annual meeting, the Board of Directors of the Canadian Conference of the Arts asked the Minister of Communications to implement the first recommendation of the Gélinas-Siren report and create the Canadian Advisory Committee on the Status of the Artist. Having worked for several years on issues related to the status of the artist, the CCA believes the creation of this Committee is a significant step, in that artists now have an official voice at the very heart of government activities.

The eight members of the Committee, each one an experienced artist or cultural worker, have met nine times since their appointment in order to review copyright, collective bargaining rights, social benefits, and the impact on artists of amendments to the Criminal Code with regard to pornography (Bill C-54). During their discussions, Committee members developed the accompanying "Statement of Fundamental Principles" which they encourage every cultural group to adopt.

The Committee has met with several high-ranking public servants in the Departments of Finance, Labour, Communications, and Justice, among others, in order to learn how these departments treat artists,



From left to right, 2nd row: Henri-Dominique Paratte, Jean-Pierre Perreault, Paul Siren, Serge Turgeon and Édouard Dérosiers, M.P., 1st row: Daphne Goldrick, Linda Patterson, Pamela Hall, the Hon. Flora MacDonald and Gratien Gélinas.

how public servants perceive the situation of artists, and what solutions are available to facilitate integrating artists' concerns into departmental programs and regulations. In view of the breadth of the problem and faced with the fact that several public servants refuse to recognize the special status of artists, the Committee submitted its first report to the Minister of Communications, including in it several recommendations on improving the status of artists within the federal administration itself.

With its direct access to the Minister of Communications, and with its mandate to promote the status of the artist among federal agencies and departments, the Committee is becoming an important tool for all artists. It is presently working on producing a general bill on the status of the artist, similar to the one recently tabled at the Quebec Legislative Assembly. However, this bill, to be presented to the government for adoption, would be for all artists—performers or creators—regardless of employment status.

In the meantime, Committee members individually and corporately welcome requests from groups who wish to meet with them and learn more about the Committee or share their special concerns with it. Groups and individuals may write to the Committee Secretary, Keith Kelly, at Department of Communications, Journal Tower North Building, 300 Slater Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0C8 or call (613) 990-4084.

Committee Members

Keith Kelly, General Secretary
Paul Siren, Co-President
Henri-Dominique Paratte (author),
Co-President
Serge Turgeon (actor, President of the
Union des Artistes)
Daphne Goldrick (actress, screenwriter,
Vice-President of the Canadian Actors'
Equity Association)
Jean-Pierre Perreault (choreographer,
dancer, President of the Jean-Pierre
Perreault Foundation)
Pamela Hall (visual artist)
Linda Patterson (musician)

Alternate Committee Members

Garry Neil (General Secretary, ACTRA)
Sara Diamond (visual artist)
Joysanne Sidimus (Executive Director,
Dancer Transition Centre)
Rudy Wiebe (author, Vice-Chairman of
the Writers' Union of Canada)
Alex Pauk (composer, President of the
Canadian League of Composers)
Serge Dermers (Executive Director of
l'Union des Artistes)
Claude Gauvin (visual artist)

Special Advisors

Michelle d'Auray (National Director,
Canadian Conference of the Arts)
Alex Pauk (composer, President of the
Canadian League of Composers)
Peter Weinrich (Executive Director,
Canadian Crafts Council)