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As our readers see it

Supporting the arts

JAMES KILPATRICK has urged the feds to get out of the Arts citing a lack of constitutional foundation.

The feds got into the arts support business because private patronage under which museums, symphony orchestras, and theater companies had grown was proving inadequate to sustain them—even at exploitive wage scales.

Federal support for the arts is most visible in the National Arts Endowment allocations but throughout the federal establishment and through the operations of tax legislation alone there are hundreds of millions of dollars of indirect support which have in fact underlain the traditional of continuous private support—which is no longer a counter to but an adjunct to federal aid. Because of federal pressures for matching funds there has opened up over the past decade upwards of \$300 million per year of corporate and business support, a source virtually unknown in the 1940s.

I share Mr. Kilpatrick's distaste for a strongly centralized federal cultural establishment, and I deplore the occasional abuses in handling institutional or personal grants. I believe that the best pattern for support is a complicated mixed system—federal-state and local public monies plus corporate and business grants plus income from the arts in all their income producing modes plus private donations.

If we could develop in our educational system an adequate introduction to the arts for the non-specialist... and if we could create a society truly literate in the aesthetic sense as well as the verbal and symbolic sense—then I think the role of the feds might be far less intrusive. At the moment a withdrawal of federal programs (there are 118 in the National Arts Endowment alone) would impinge on renaissance of cities, reduce drastically quality of life, disrupt nascent efforts to involve artists in education, create a new...
ism.

The arts are the business of the fe

as the business of the feds is a whole and sensitive society.

If we had a bureaucratized complex of agencies administering federal funds along the lines of the Interstate Commerce Commission, then I would join Mr. Kilpatrick in his cry for an end to federal arts programs, or if we demanded a cultural uniformity or if we eliminated artistic effort critical of the government—then indeed should we stop federal programs.

But now let us rather be ashamed and appalled at the miserable pittance which federal funding actually represents, let us rather be angered at the incoherence of cultural policies; let us be proud, however, of a governmental policy, carried on by Miss Hanks and Mr. Michael Straight, which has avoided elitism, rejected banality, and elicited from artist and public alike a great efflorescence of American creativity.

A country which has the best performing orchestras, the best dance companies, and the most vital creative artists can be proud not querulous about its government's posture...

ALLEN D. SAPP