

Creative Industries

Debate

11.40 am

Moved By Lord Bragg

To call attention to the contribution of the creative industries to the United Kingdom economy; and to move for Papers.

Lord Bragg: My Lords, I think that I shall wait a moment until the select few have gathered. I am grateful to have been given the chance to mount this debate. I hope that it will prove once and for all that the creative industries in this country are the flagship and the most powerful identifying characteristic of what we in the UK in the 21st century can do well both at home and abroad, and in the process enrich not only the economy but the minds and imagination of people here and around the world.

A recent analysis by NESTA suggests that between 2009 and 2013 the UK's creative industries will grow on average at 4 per cent per annum—more than double the rate of the rest of the economy. By 2013 this sector is expected to employ about 1.3 million people—more than the financial sector; it is likely that there will be 180,000 creative businesses here compared with 148,000 today; and it is expected to contribute £85 billion to UK value-added, up from £57 billion today. Last

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April, the business Secretary, the noble Lord, Lord Mandelson, acknowledged the contribution of the creative industries to Britain's economy and said that it was central to ensuring the future success of the country.

I shall continue for a moment with statistics. For most of them, I am indebted to the National Campaign for the Arts, the UK's only independent lobbying organisation representing all the arts, cross-party, cross-culture and, as its president, I can say always across the subject.

Moreover, it is worth hammering away for a few moments because there is still a stolid, ostrich, unimaginative conviction that the arts are somehow whimsical, marginal and verging on the dismissible. It is rumoured that even some of those in government still hold to that view. The industrial fact, to use the devil's argument, is that the creative industries in this country have outstripped, and will continue to outstrip even those ancient and venerable giants that powered and traumatised this country through the industrial revolution.

In 1997, our creative economy accounted for less than 4 per cent of UK gross value-added. In 2007, it stood at 7.3 per cent, having grown at 6 per cent per annum compared with 3 per cent for the rest of the economy. The UK has the largest creative sector in the EU and, relative to GDP, probably

in the world. It employs a host of golden specialists who can and do travel the world with their crafts, works, books, music and arts, like roving European medieval scholars. Regarded as a sideshow by some, the overall impact of British theatre alone is £26 billion annually from a subsidy of £120 million.

The musicals of the noble Lord, Lord Lloyd-Webber, and Sir Cameron Mackintosh, for example, spin around the globe like Ariel in "The Tempest" and bring in profits simply unheard of in any other age. These two men started out as kids on the block doing the thing they loved but they were hugely aided by the cultural density in this country and, with that help have become creators and supporters of highly specialised skills as well as writers, composers and producers of world renown in their own right.

Inside these statistics are individuals or very small groups who form an astonishingly modern cultural collective. Curiously enough, this is very like the way in which the first industrial revolution—the mechanised industrial revolution, probably the greatest revolution of all time—got under way. Talented, pig headed, brilliant individuals—mostly in the north of England—followed their own obsessive path. I think that what we are seeing now is the first rocket stage of what will prove to be a creative cultural revolution that is perhaps just as radical and influential.

Take as a small example the 6,000 employees in Birmingham's magnificently rejuvenated jewellery quarter—niche craftsmen who command a world clientele. They are joined at the hip with those northern inventors of the late 18th and 19th centuries. And we have a good enabling history here. Our progress in the creative arts is not a fluke: from the Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts which came out of the Second World War; to Jennie Lee at the

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Arts Council in the 1960s; to Sir John Major and the noble Lord, Lord Gowrie, and the lottery funding—boon time throughout Britain; and on to the Labour Government who, since 1997, have put up funding by 73 per cent.

Private support has grown too, through tax breaks and philanthropy, and now the sum is more than £600 million a year. And of course there are shortcomings, and missed opportunities, and bureaucratic bungling, and the constraints of philistinism, and the British sound of moan which is sometimes justified. But fair's fair. There has been an overall success, even triumph, in culture and the arts during the past 15 or 20 years, and until very recently it has been one of our best kept secrets.

Speakers in this debate will wish to cover different parts of the territory. I see my role as giving the overview, and I shall concentrate on only two or three specific aspects. I stress again that although larger economic forces are at work and must continue to work for the creative industries—of course we need art colleges and schools and academies for film, theatre and music; and we need structures such as the Arts Council and overseeing agencies

such as the DCMS; and we need the BBC, with its invaluable and massive cultural presence; and other broadcasters, such as ITV, Channel 4 and now Sky Arts—in my opinion, this is at root the story of individuals. They must be allowed to breathe and flourish.

My fear, as I read government initiatives now climbing on what I hope I may be forgiven for calling the bandwagon, is that the weight, even the blight, of bureaucracy will stifle the enterprise of those individuals. Already in the past year or two, to take a small example, over-complex rules about the playing of live music in pubs and clubs have threatened not only the seeding ground of our exceptionally successful popular music culture, but ruined many people's idea of a good night out.

An even more harmful example of unintended consequences of government regulation and interference was pointed out yesterday in the Times by Dame Joan Bakewell, the chairman of NCA. She wrote:

“The Home Office is making a mockery of Britain's reputation”.

She wrote that immigration controls are proving so unnecessarily difficult for artists from abroad, that they are turning away rather than waste time and money on our bureaucratic and complexities. She wrote that Solokov, the Russian pianist, lost patience and called off concerts at the Barbican and the Royal Festival Hall. The Iranian director of ENO's “Cosi fan tutti” has not been admitted into the country. As Sir Richard Dearlove pointed out at the Hay Festival last week, over-extensions of the Terrorism Act threaten liberties elsewhere. For this country, a great international centre for the arts and a refuge for some of the greatest artists and musicians, to become a no-go area is surely the unacceptable fact of a lack of joined-up government thinking. Lord knows what they would have done at the time of the industrial revolution if they had gone north—probably strangle it at birth. I fear the grasping claws of quangos. There is a fine book on oral history by George Ewart Evans entitled *Ask the Fellows Who Cut the Hay*. I suggest that the

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Home Office, the DCMS and all the other cultural bodies impale these words on their notice boards and websites. The arts in this country have always flourished either in solitary confinement or when two or three are gathered together in small clusters, in which individuals, a few like-minded individuals, have given us great riches. It is a delicate balance to cultivate without crushing, but to achieve that balance is one of the most important missions for the immediate future of the creative industries.

In my opinion, the way to kill the creative industries is to straitjacket them in regulations and subject them to that influential new army of consultants who, bewilderingly, claim merit from starting with a clean slate—that is, knowing nothing about the subject. Artists have their own slates and knowing about their subject is their life's work, so ask the artists who do the work.

Of course, there is something to say about money. There always will be. Sir Christopher Frayling, who stood down as Arts Council chairman earlier this year and is still rector of the Royal College of Art, said recently:

“Most of the big performing arts companies get about a third of their funding from the Arts Council, a third from the box office and a third from merchandising or sponsorship. If government money wobbles during a recession ... that means the second two-thirds of the funding will fall away too, which could be disastrous for many companies”.

Frayling’s successor at the Arts Council, Dame Liz Forgan, who has seen a small cut in comparative terms to the Arts Council budget, announced that an extra £445 million would be invested in during the next two years specifically to help maintain artistic excellence during the economic turndown. That is the good news: there are good hands on the tiller.

Kevin Spacey, the artistic director of the Old Vic, is a remarkable and unusual example of success with a company that receives no public subsidy whatever. Despite that, he has put together not only an exceptional programme inside the Old Vic, but a thrilling programme of workshops, school projects and community productions involving literally thousands of children from low-income families who live just outside the Old Vic, in its immediate neighbourhood. He wrote recently that,

“the creative industries lead the UK economy and are the envy of the world. Having lived here for seven years, I genuinely believe that the UK’s pre-eminence in the arts and culture constitutes one of the nation’s most powerful resources”.

Sometimes it is useful to see ourselves as others see us, such as Kevin Spacey and his fellow American, the late Sam Wanamaker, who recreated the Globe and gave us so much.

It would be flattering to ourselves to think that we had a natural and unique genius for the arts in this country, although perhaps there is something in that. More importantly, we have great traditions: first, in some of the finest artists and examples of the past centuries, but also in our colleges and in the workplace of theatres, orchestras and choirs. Perhaps even more important than that, it is a living tradition regrouped and refreshed through generations by new generations, and added to by them, and it goes on and on. The recent surge has been greatly helped by more training and interest in schools, as we see in our classical music,

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which is so strong at the moment, and tracks back through youth orchestras to school orchestras and now even to primary school orchestras. One million young people benefit from the Youth Music programme, and in the past few years more than 100 new

arts buildings have been opened and more than 500 refurbished. It is not only classical music. The whole brass band tradition is undergoing a renaissance. We have the world' s leading brass band players among our children. And on popular music in this country, well, where shall we begin? There is a breadth and quality here unmatched anywhere outside the home of popular music, the USA, which has a five times bigger population.