

## THE GENERAL RADICAL

In the 1960s and 70s, at the height of the Black Panther movement, people from communities across the US were organizing to fight endemic racism, police brutality, militarization of public space and cultural hegemony. Demanding that basic social safety nets such as daycare be put in place and naming the individuals responsible for brutality against the black and other communities, the Panther's catalyzed a moment of transition, creating powerful alternatives to the order of the day. All these years later, noting that many of the changes that the Panthers fought for remain urgent matters today, Valerie Palmer in this issue's interview "Revolution in Our Lifetime" asks Black Panther's graphic artist and Minister of Culture Emory Douglas what the role of art and artists could be. "The artist has to respect the common concern of the community," Douglas replies, "If you've got art that's helping people escape their problems, then you're dealing with art that serves the interests of those who want to continue to oppress you... Art can be educational, it can show solidarity with others who are struggling. It can have a spirit of resistance or expose oppression and deal with institutions that don't serve the community's best interests."



Photo: Lisa Kanevko

This conversation between Palmer and Douglas was at the top of my mind when a series of funding cuts to the arts were implemented by the federal government this late August. These were handed down surreptitiously, quietly, while parliament was on its summer break and no debate could be held in the House of Commons. With the announcement, leaked a series of justifications that named the unofficial reason for the cuts (the official reason being more "disciplined spending") — the left-wing ideological leanings (one described as a "general radical") of some of the recipients. Masking their retreat from funding not only arts organizations but other progressive initiatives such as women's groups, harm reduction programs, youth training, research institutes, food inspection, environmental organizations and health policy, the Conservative government explained that they are "trimming the fat."

Since taking power in 2006, the Harper Conservatives have eliminated over \$40 Million dollars

from Cultural and Heritage Granting Programs. The programs affected in the recent wave of cuts to the arts — Promart, Trade Routes, the Canadian Arts and Heritage Sustainability Program, Canadian Independent Film and Video, National Training Program in Film and Video and the Audio Video Preservation Trust — were designed to assist artists, arts institutions and not-for-profit charitable organizations to create, develop, promote and disseminate Canadian art both nationally and internationally. As opposition MP Peggy Nash noted about the recent justifications for the cuts, "There is real concern the government is picking and choosing which artists it is supporting and which artists it is not supporting. I suggest, in a democracy, that is a dangerous thing."

The attempt by this government to slide through a series of drastic and draconian funding cuts while the house is off for its summer recess has been met with outrage from already cash-strapped arts and other not-for-profit organizations who have been reeling from attacks on culture and the broader social safety nets that Canadians have been building since the 1950s. Within the arts and not-for-profit sectors, in opposition to instrumentalist arguments that prioritize the amount of money each sector generates for Canada's GNP, we must start talking about what a healthy society looks like when it doesn't bow to a liberalized marketplace. The years since NAFTA have clearly shown that we cannot put any faith in the market to serve the common good nor allow its ideological agenda to dominate social planning. We must remember that a decent society to live in, one which not only considers but prioritizes the welfare of its citizenry, is a reasonable expectation. And to heed Douglas' words, it is time to put our energies toward unseating those institutions that do not serve the community's interests. People across the country have responded to the cuts by organizing to defeat a Conservative government that has shown callous disregard for our well-being. With an election looming, we need to mobilize our resources and take our seats at the negotiating table.

— Izida Zorde