



OPINION COLUMNISTS

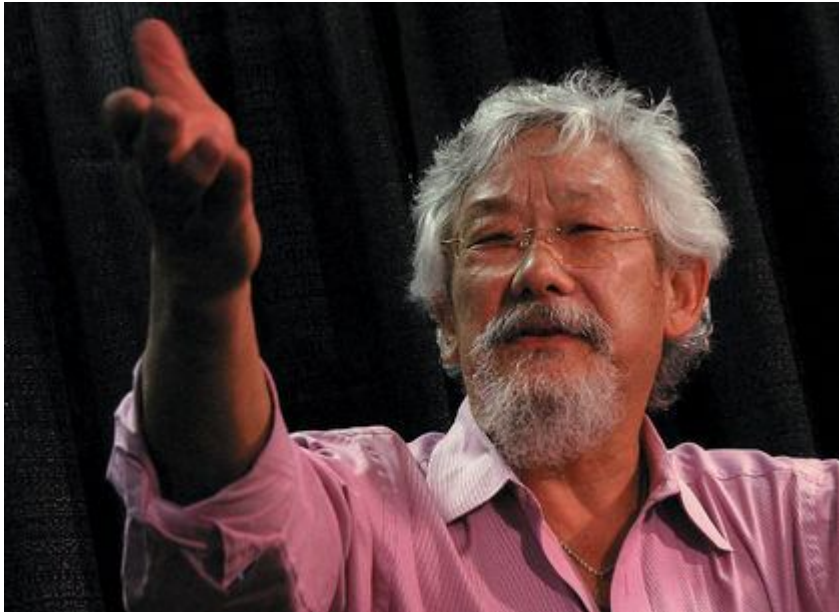
Charities Have No Place In Suzuki's Political Theatre



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Last fall, three anti-oilsands lobby groups hosted the "Trial of Suzuki." It was a strange gimmick -- a mock trial wherein David Suzuki would be "prosecuted" for treason because of his environmentalist views.

Of course, the opposite is true. Suzuki has never been charged, or even threatened with prosecution for his views. This is Canada, not an OPEC dictatorship. Rather, Suzuki

has been given a national platform on the government TV channel, the CBC, where he has pontificated for nearly 50 years. There's another layer of irony to it, too. Suzuki has called for the jailing of people who disagree with his views on global warming.

It's a free country, and anti-oilsands activists do like their stunts. But why was this PR gimmick co-sponsored by the Royal Ontario Museum, a public institution using taxpayers' money? The ROM is a non-political charity. Its mandate is to be educational, not political.

It's one thing for lobby groups to rent a room at the ROM to have their own event. But that didn't happen. Suzuki's lobby group, the \$10-million-a-year David Suzuki Foundation, and another environmentalist group called the Ivey Foundation, and a foreign anti-oil lobby group called the Cape Farewell Foundation, got the room for free. More than that, they had the labour of a dozen ROM staff – paid for by taxpayers. And the ROM put their logo on the whole thing.

Since when do museums take sides in ongoing political debates?

The Trial of Suzuki wasn't just a bizarre slander against the Canadian government, baselessly pretending they want to prosecute him for his politics. It was a forum for those politics, too. In the droning two-hour event, Suzuki pitched every left-wing cliché from higher carbon taxes to banning oilsands development. Suzuki – who has appeared in TV ads for the Liberal Party – used the ROM to campaign for a political point of view.

That's fine for Suzuki to do. But what's the ROM doing supporting this?

Would the ROM also support the other side of the debate – a pro-oil lobby group? Not just giving them free space and free staff, but also officially endorsing a PR gimmick and publicizing it? Who gets to choose the ROM's political views?

In this case, the answer is Dave Ireland and Bep Schippers. They're global warming activists who work as executives at the ROM. According to ROM e-mails obtained by the Sun, last summer Ireland wrote an e-mail to Schippers showing her the proposal for the Suzuki stunt, saying: "hey Bep, in confidence, check this out... freakin cool idea... I agree with Suzuki's manifesto."

Schippers wrote right back: "Hey Dave. Super freaking cool idea and we are going to make it happen no matter what. It's the edgiest thing the ROM has been involved in since the history of the ROM and the only way we would be able to pull something like this off is with a partnership like this." As in, to team up with three anti-oil lobby groups.

Schippers was clearly aware that this was outside the ROM's rules of partisanship: "It may be rocky - but totally worth it in the end. I'm willing to rock the internal boat on this one."

And here's the exact moment when the ROM ceased to be a museum and officially became a partisan anti-oil lobby group:

“We the ROM shouldn't have to be neutral. We are allowed to take sides -- it's science man,” wrote Schippers.

Except calling for a carbon tax isn't science, it's politics. Smearing the Canadian government as a censor isn't science. It's politics.

And all of this, bought and paid for by anti-oilsands lobby groups.

Free speech, right? But do taxpayers a favour – don't make us pay for it through government grants, and with charitable tax status. And please stop calling the ROM a museum.