

The Importance of the Census

The Census which will be taken in Canada in June 1951, will be the most important since the first Census of the Dominion in 1871. In the first place, it is at the half-way mark of the century and will give us more measurement of the progress made during that period. It will show us how we compare today in human resources, the greatest asset of a nation, and how the greatest of our primary industries - agriculture - compares with the beginnings of a half century of development.

In the second place, it will reveal many changes as compared with the Census of 1941. In the interval we have experienced the great cataclysm of the Second World War, which changed vastly the pattern of our economy. There have been important shifts in population as between provinces. Since the industrialization of the Dominion was considerably accelerated, more and more people moved to the cities and towns from rural areas. At the same time, the occupations of the people have undergone substantial changes. The population has also continued to become older on the average. These and many more changes from 1941 will be brought out in the 1951 Census.

New Techniques

The next Census will also be especially important because it will mark the introduction of drastic changes in technique. Canada is introducing new procedures which may set a new pattern for other countries. Owing to the importance of census data and their usefulness for a vast variety of purposes, it is essential that the census be completed with greater speed. In the past it has been a time-consuming process to get out the final results. The increased costs of taking a census make it imperative to find new means of shortening the collection and tabulation processes. The Bureau of Statistics has attacked the problem in several ways.

1. For the Population and Housing Census, the usual cumbersome 'line' schedule into which all information had to be written is being replaced by a 'mark-sense' card for each individual.

In a mark-sense document, a question is answered by making a mark in a pre-arranged space instead of writing the answer in full. Special electronic machines read the marks and produce automatically, as an 'end' product, a punched card. One great advantage of this new procedure is the elimination of most of the hand-punching of hollerith cards, which was one of the delaying factors in past censuses.

2. New machines - The electronic statistical machine, a recent invention, will be used for the census compilations. These machines are far superior to any hitherto available, including machines which had been invented in the Bureau for use in the 1931 Census and which increased census output immensely. The new electronic statistical machine can count and sort at the same time; it permits of a wider range of simultaneous cross-classifications, and is much speedier in operation. The machine-processing of documents and punch cards for