



Statements and Speeches

No. 81/14

CANADIAN ARTS AND CULTURE – POLICY REVIEW

An Address by the Honourable Francis Fox, Minister of Communications, to the Canadian Conference of the Arts, Ottawa, May 7, 1981

I am particularly glad to be able to speak to you tonight. We share the same concerns. In many ways we face the same problems. These concerns and these problems are part of your professional lives. In the year since I became minister responsible for the arts they have become the core of my professional life as well.

Thirty years ago the Lévesque-Massey Commission took on the problems of its day. It must be with a joyous sense of fruitful work accomplished that Father Lévesque and the other members of the Commission look on the state of Canadian arts and culture today. Looking around you at all these artists, you must feel, Father Lévesque, as if you're looking at generations who owe their creative existence to your efforts – your spiritual descendants, so to speak. Granted we now face many difficulties. But these are mainly the heady difficulties that stem from very rapid expansion and very great success. And this extraordinary success story of Canadian arts is attributable in large measure to that work of 30 years ago. As indicated in the opening chapter of your *Strategy for Culture*: "We've come a long way in those thirty years."

The Canada Council's brief to the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee gives some idea of just how far we have indeed come. Thirty years ago the total published literary output of English Canada was 55 books – 14 fiction, 35 poetry and drama, and six miscellaneous. The National Gallery had a paid staff of four. And most concerts in Canada were given in school gymnasiums, hotel rooms, and movie theatres rented for the occasion.

The more accomplishments there are, the more questions there are. The development of the arts, the support of the arts and the relationship of the arts to our society are fundamental questions we must assess once again. We are all looking for answers. Finding answers is all the more difficult because the picture is changing so fast. If we can't find all these right answers immediately, it is vital for us at least to effect some changes while we seek out better answers – and improved questions.

It is not coincidental that Canada is facing renewal on every front – from Constitution to culture. Our country is riding a wave of history. The wave is carrying us into a new era as a nation. We must see to it that we arrive from that ride renewed and strengthened – not fundamentally changed; but all the more Canadian.

What are the cultural ties that bind this nation, or any nation, for that matter? Cultural ties can be defined to include a number of common elements.

Common history, geography and backgrounds. Common customs and common modes of thought. Common habits, common languages and one other element not usually
