



Statements and Speeches

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NATIONAL INFORMATION IN THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

An Address by Pierre Juneau, Deputy Minister, Department of Communications, to the Harvard University Program on Information Resources Policy, Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.A., November 11, 1980

...It has been nearly five years since Marc Porat informed us that over half of the American work force was engaged in handling information. Other nations quickly conducted their own counts to come to more or less the same conclusions: A fundamental change has taken place in the nature of work throughout the "industrialized" world, if we can still call it that.

This change to an information economy reaches to the very heart of the structures of our society: to the infrastructures of transportation and communications; to the way business is organized; the way government is conducted; money changes hands; products are made; leisure is enjoyed, and; as this meeting attests, how people are informed.

The full consequences of this fundamental development still elude us. Our economists have not yet quite determined what information is, how it behaves, how it can be measured, how it should be valued, and how it may be taxed. Political scientists are far from agreement about its political role, and the quality of international debate, though improving, is still sometimes dominated by shrill statements, oversimplifications, and the confusion of myth and reality. Industrialists, who have seen their empires expand trans-nationally as a direct result of increasing speed and capacity, are now facing a painful restructuring of their hierarchies along information lines.

The Canada-United States relationship cannot help but be affected by these changes, since we are each other's largest trading partners, and our largest foreign investments are placed on or in each other's soil. The enormous complexity of our communications relationship, by far the most sophisticated between any two nations, reinforces our profound social and cultural ties. They bind our economies so closely together, that major developments in one are immediately felt on the other's stock market. Ideas, concepts, approaches, techniques flow freely across the common border. Canadian and U.S. executives, celebrities, academics, intellectuals, are all but interchangeable.

Underlying this powerful symbiosis are a number of fundamental and commonly-held beliefs. Canadians, no less than Americans, believe that freedom of expression is a fundamental right. Canadians are just as intolerant as Americans of censorship or of any other form of government interference in the content of the media or the arts. If there was even the suspicion, for example, that the state-funded Canadian Broadcasting Corporation was being pressured by government to orient its programs, and most particularly the news or public affairs programming, the outcry would be deafening. Newspapers in Canada as in the United States base their reputation on their independence.

Beliefs in
common