

Freedom and the police

The view of Canadian society which has always been presented by our politicians, school textbooks, and information media is that of a "free" society. We have been told that if economic inequalities are much greater here than in certain other countries, at least we enjoy civil liberties like the rights of association, expression, dissent, and privacy which citizens of those countries do not. Most Canadians who have offered their lives in war did so in the belief that they were defending such liberties.

In reality our civil liberties in Canada can be swept away by the arbitrary power of the State and the police. This became obvious seven years ago when in Quebec 497 persons were incarcerated without charges and denied bail, access to legal counsel, and communication with the outside world.

Disclosures in recent months about the covert activities of our national police force once again raise disturbing questions concerning fundamental freedoms in this country. When policemen are, for political reasons, listening to people's telephone and bedroom conversations, keeping files on the personal lives of opposition parliamentarians and union members, and infiltrating legal organizations, is not our right to freedom of association being abused?

When (as happened in connection with the police break-in of a Montreal news agency) a senior officer who pleads guilty to a serious criminal act is released without penalty and restored to his position, has not the principle of equality before the law been deeply eroded?

When there exists legislation like the Official Secrets Act allowing the government in power to tap telephones and open mail without judicial authorization, have not the politicians taken from us our right to privacy?

When a branch of the RCMP has a mandate to survey "peace" and "protest" groups, and to warn employers against hiring members of such groups, is not the basic security of citizens and their ability to work for a better world seriously menaced?

There have always been and probably always will be segments of the community which are unwilling to recognize the human rights of others. Earlier this year, for example, the president of the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs called for the outlawing of some opposition political organizations. Those of us who consider civil rights important must be vigilant in seeking their observance. The present Prime Minister seems unconcerned about such matters as the police surveillance of his parliamentary opponents, and only under considerable pressure did he consent to an enquiry into the criminal activities of the RCMP. Similarly, the Solicitor-General has withheld evidence from the Quebec provincial investigation of these activities, arguing that to do otherwise would threaten "national security." Yet the Royal Commission and the Quebec enquiry may provide an occasion for all of us to reflect on the power granted the police in our society, and in various ways to insist on the full recognition of civil liberties in Canada.

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Letters

To the Editors,

Thanks for the Atlantic Issues. They're great! . . . I'm enclosing the latest **Dimension**. Thanks for the plug. We will be plugging Atlantic Issues in our next.

Cy Gonick,
Canadian Dimension Magazine

[Ed. note: The magazine's address is: 44 Princess Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 1K2 \$7.00 per year, 12 issues.]

To the Editors,

. . . We have more than enjoyed these publications and look forward to future issues.

Mrs. Constance Atcheson,
Information Centre,
Saint John Regional Library

To the Editors,

. . . I think (Atlantic Issues) is one of the most refreshing vital analyses I have seen in some time . . .

Betty Peterson
Janvrius Harbour
West Arichat, Cape Breton

To the Editors,

. . . I have received a first copy and enjoyed it very much—will pass it on to my neighbours, who are also interested in keeping informed about local affairs and their wider implications.

I enclose a donation.. Thank you very much.

Barbara Conway
Antigonish County, Nova Scotia

To the Editors,

Thank you for the copies of Atlantic Issues. I found it most interesting and could serve a very useful place in Atlantic Canada as perhaps an alternative press or perhaps more an issue identifier where our problems would be brought out in some detail.

. . . Personally, I think someone should look at where workers in Atlantic Canada will be when the Wage Controls Programme ends, considering that increases of 8, 6 and 4 per cent for Canada were on wage rates already (Oct. 1975) from 70-80 per cent below national averages.

Leo F. McKay
Nova Scotia Federation of Labour

To the Editors,

Enclosed is a cheque. Now that you have produced your second issue you have demonstrated evidence of staying power. I hope you will be able to sustain the effort. I plan to use the issues as case studies in my training laboratories for Development Workers. As a learning resource, it will save me a great deal of time and effort—hence this is not a contribution but a payment for resource material.

It is important to my role as an Adult Educator to have resource material which is not opinion, nor activist, but grounded in fact with measured evidence. I hope you can avoid the temptation to "spout off" or become political..What we need is a support system for the activist and politician to make them credible.

Keep up the effort!

Luke L. Batdorf
Continuing Education,
St. Francis Xavier University,
Antigonish, Nova Scotia