

# Journalist slams Canadian politics



Photo Dave Grandy

Charles Lynch, chief of Southam News: "We are the most politically illiterate people in the world."

by Richard Watts

"Canadians are the most politically illiterate people in the Western World."

So said Charles Lynch in a recent appearance at the U of A where he attempted to answer the question of "Why?" such a condition exists.

Lynch comes armed with impressive qualifications to address such an issue. Presently he is Chief of Southam News Service, having spent over forty years in journalism. He is without doubt a man deeply committed to Canada and its government; he serves this commitment through his involve-

ment with Canada's press. This commitment is what makes Lynch bemoan the state of political illiteracy existing in this country.

Political illiteracy occurs when a people do not understand their own system, do not know what their elected leaders are doing, and refuse to actively involve themselves with the politics of their own country.

"As Canadians it is important to discuss issues, ask questions and involve ourselves with what our government leaders are doing. Lynch maintained that Canadians do not involve themselves with government.

As proof that this situation is potentially dangerous Lynch said:

"If we had become as heavily socialized as we are now because we had wanted to I wouldn't be worried. But I don't think that is the case."

Lynch said Canada has undergone a series of major changes to become so heavily socialized; changes that other countries have achieved only through bloody revolutions. Lynch blamed the minority governments of Lester Person and Pierre Trudeau for this

high degree of socialization in Canada maintaining that they have paid too much attention to the New Democratic Party.

Lynch seemed very concerned with the degree of Canada's socialization. He spoke of big government intruding more and more into the lives of Canadians. What really bothered Lynch was his claim that this "big government" had no direction and was being expanded and operated by politicians with no direction who are "just making it up as they go along."

As an example of the performance of directionless politicians Lynch mentioned Liberal member John Turner. The Liberals, said Lynch, are gearing themselves up for another mania in the same mode as Trudeau mania. Lynch objected to this because he maintained that Turner had never attached himself to any one particular issue.

"There has never been any discussion of Turner's beliefs. All we really know about him is that he has pretty blue eyes."

Lynch blamed four groups for the political illiteracy of the Canadian people: the Canadian press, the Canadian educators, the Canadian politicians, and the Canadian people.

The first institution, the one on whom Lynch placed the largest portion of the blame, was the Canadian Press. The press, said Lynch, has not lived up to its responsibilities which Lynch described as the "exercising of free speech on behalf of the public."

The second group Lynch pointed an accusing finger at was Canada's educators. People are leaving school without an adequate understanding or appreciation of the way our system of government works or operates.

"People are being turned out of the Education system who would rather not become in-

Lynch reiterated his disdain for the Trudeau- and upcoming Turner- manias. The press have become too concerned with reporting on the images of our politicians instead of what our politicians stand for.

Lynch mentioned the press coverage Joe Clark has received from the press. He said the media have placed a misconception in the mind of the Canadian public about Joe Clark that is unfair.

"If Clark stood for anything he stood for de-centralization of the federal government. But you never read about that in the newspapers."

He added that he thought that the government had to de-centralize or the country would face almost certain fragmentation.

In dealing with the educators of Canada Lynch said that people were leaving school without a knowledge or appreciation of how a Constitutional Monarchy operates.

Lynch compared the Canadian public, who hang back refusing to get involved, with Americans, who have a determination to make their system work.

"When the Americans go through a shattering experience like Watergate they have something there that keeps them going, making the system work, a sort of keeping of the faith."

Lynch said he lamented the fact that Canada's Education system was never federally politicized. The only province in the country that has a highly politicized education system, says Lynch, is Quebec. This has given rise to the Parti Quebecois, and this party is one which Lynch says he can never feel sympathy for since he is so unalterably opposed to their ultimate aims.

The next group to receive Lynch's condemnation was Canada's politicians, for failing to

*"Our system works best when our public figures become identified with particular issues. But our politicians never get a chance to explain even why they run for office"*

involved in politics and so end up shunning their own interests first," said Lynch.

The third group Lynch blamed for the political illiteracy of the Canadian people is the Canadian politicians who have failed to involve the electorate in the workings of the government.

The last group to blame, said Lynch, is the Canadian public. By choosing not to become involved in politics the Canadian people are allowing the country's politicians to take advantage of their positions as leaders.

Dealing with the press, Lynch outlined the dilemma the media faces when trying to inform the public of the workings of their own government. The dilemma arises from a situation in which 70 per cent of the public read Ann Landers with any amount of comprehension while only 10 per cent read the political news. The press is caught between trying to satisfy mass needs and the needs of serious scholars.

"Modern communication," commented Lynch, "is a wonder but the people of this country are not enlightened. Instead, they are apathetic and frightened."

The press, said Lynch, are trying too hard to make the political news short, readable and interesting. This has spawned what is often termed disco journalism, although Lynch baldly called it "smart-ass journalism."

involve the electorate in the workings of the government.

The last group of people who Lynch blamed was the public themselves, for their apathy and general disinterest in the workings of their own government.

Lynch said the Canadian public is under the delusion that politics is something that people shouldn't become involved with and this arises from a cynicism about politics in general. This cynicism is a result of the poor coverage of politics by the media, a poor education by Canada's educators, and politicians who have failed to involve the people in the workings of their own government.

I personally would have to agree with Lynch. It has been easy to become cynical about politics. Once that state of cynicism is reached it is even easier to choose not to become involved.

However Charles Lynch is right when he states that choosing not to become involved in the politics of one's own country is ignoring your own interests first of all.

It is time Canadians made a long overdue effort to understand the workings of their own government and make democracy function. Leaving the governing of the country to the politicians elected to Ottawa will create self-serving charlatans instead of persons devoted to the public which placed them in power.

**Interested in Becoming a Chartered Accountant?**

Want to know more about the educational requirements? What a Chartered Accountant does and what career opportunities are available?

Find the answers from a practicing chartered accountant.

**March 9, 1983, Room 457 CAB, U of A**

Sessions At: 9:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.  
1:30 p.m. 3:00 p.m.

**INSTITUTE OF CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS OF ALBERTA**

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA co-sponsored by Alberta CULTURE

**sub theatre**

*Spoons*

SUB THEATRE presents

Tuesday, March 22 - 7 pm.  
Tickets: SUB Box Office - all BASS outlets.  
With Special Guests