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TOWARD THE DEFINITION OF A CULTURAL POLICY

The following excerpts are from a recent address by Mr. Gérard Pelletier, the Secretary of State, to the Board of Trade of Montreal:

...The Department of the Secretary of State is, in reality, a federal department of cultural affairs. To realize this we have simply to glance over the list of agencies which come under this department or for which the Secretary of State is the spokesman in Parliament. Among these organizations are the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board, the Arts Council, the National Museums, the National Library and Archives, the National Arts Centre, the Canadian Radio-Television Commission and assistance for the development of the film industry. You will agree with me in concluding that, from all appearances, we do, in fact deal with culture....

What manufacturer, these days, does not take the aesthetic aspect into account in manufacturing his product, whether it be a car, a spoon or a refrigerator. We need only cite the example of Scandinavia to prove that a furniture industry can be based on taste rather than cost.

A country without artists, without any cultural atmosphere, a country deprived of the kind of men who dream in colours and forms, is soon doomed to become an underdeveloped country.

When I was a reporter, President Bourguiba once said to me during an interview: "Slow economic development disturbs a great many people; slow intellectual development disturbs far fewer, yet we must attack the latter first if we want to conquer the former."

Thus, culture is not a mere nicety, art is not an incidental, inessential activity, a luxury on which to spend our excess wealth. They are rather the pillars

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of any rich and significant social life, of any healthy, dynamic economy.

That is why a government – any government – would be just as much to blame for neglecting culture or treating it like a poor relative as it would be for not building highways or letting its forests burn down. That is also why it seems inconceivable to me that in 1968 a government should not become involved in intellectual matters. And finally, that is why the Secretary of State Department is not lost in unrealities, a magician's venture or a refuge for dealers in dreams; it is one of the main centres of activity in the Canadian Government, a department which has the power to influence our individual and collective lives just as much as the Department of Trade and Commerce or the Department of Transport.

Before leaving these preliminaries, let us look towards the future for a moment, towards the leisure society which is being predicted by many authorities, and which in fact is already here for the manual labourers who work a 40-hour week or the white-collar workers on a 35-hour week. If we consider this leisure society how can we fail to see that, more than ever before, as Malraux would say, we need to understand what we are doing on this earth and to recognize the need for a culture which will give meaning to our lives.

Is there any great power which is not making a name for itself in the field of culture? We need only