

The Importance of Local Effort

Once the warning has been given, the operational responsibility for civil defence falls upon the local organization. The aims of civil defence are to reduce loss of life; to provide medical and other assistance to the civilian population; to restore public utilities as quickly as possible; to minimize property damage; and to ensure the continuation of essential war production. These aims can best be achieved by those authorities which, in normal times, have the responsibility for maintaining the facilities and public services of our complex modern communities.

In this connection, I might point out that an important principle of civil defence is that it utilizes all existing facilities and services, and augments these by training auxiliaries -- for example: auxiliary policemen, fire-fighters, and so on. That is one reason why local responsibility for the operational aspect of civil defence is so essential. It would represent an unwarranted intrusion on local rights and would only make for inefficiency, were the Federal Government, for instance, to step in and take over the operation of a community's fire, police, or public health services.

I want to emphasize that the federal role in civil defence is primarily that of a guiding and co-ordinating agency rather than that of an operational authority. That the Federal Government is undertaking its full responsibilities in this important field is best indicated perhaps by the fact that, on a per capita basis, our annual federal commitments for civil defence exceed those of our good neighbours to the south.

As I have implied, civil defence in Canada is a co-operative effort in which there has been an excellent spirit of collaboration between governments at the various levels and the many non-governmental agencies that have given their support to this vital activity. Civil Defence, perhaps more than any other field of action, points up the problems -- but, at the same time, underlines the inherent strength -- of the federal system of government. On the one hand we have had to face and solve the complex questions presented by our constitutional divisions in jurisdictional responsibility. On the other hand, because of the very fact that we operate under a federal system rather than through one single central government, we enjoy the distinct advantage of being able to work through small local governments which are in close daily contact with the individual citizen.

Thus, while we have learned valuable lessons from the experience of other countries, notably the United States and the United Kingdom, we in Canada have had to keep in mind that these lessons can only be of value if they are adapted to our own particular conditions and needs. Besides the distinctive federal structure of our government, questions of climate, geography and so on, all affect the nature of our planning.

For example, organizational patterns that may well apply in densely-populated Britain -- a unitary state with many large cities, short lines of communication, and subject to the risk of continuous attack because of its