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Report proposes dramatic changes to
Canadian culture, 1

Canadian cars for New York subway, 4

Last sternwheeler to be restored, 4

Assistance to Central America, 4

Northern Telecom's high-tech plant opens
in Winnipeg, 4

Royal commission to guide Canada's
economic future, 5

Farm machinery for Sudan, 6

Body building booming business for
truck manufacturer, 6

Small rise in fuel costs, 7

Hope for world cup soccer in Canada, 7

Elderly myth decried, 7

News briefs, 8

Report proposes dramatic changes to Canadian culture

All aspects of cultural life in Canada were touched on in the report released last month of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee, which recommends sweeping changes to the country's cultural establishment.

The committee's two-year study of Canadian culture was directed under the joint chairmanship of Toronto composer and former executive director of the Ontario Arts Council Louis Applebaum and Montreal publisher and author Jacques Hébert. Their work represented the first major inquiry into cultural policy in Canada since the Massey-Lévesque royal commission of 30 years ago.

Tabled in the House of Commons on November 15, the report containing 101 recommendations was presented as a blueprint for Canada's cultural policy into the next century. Communications Minister Francis Fox said that "a good part of the Applebaum-Hébert report will find its way into implementation by the government". He stressed that the recommendations were long-term and that any dramatic changes would come only after

intensive study and debate. The proposals are to be examined by a Cabinet committee headed by Social Development Minister Jack Austin.

Artistic creativity

The report calls for a major change of direction in cultural policy, away from a concentration on "physical plant" and organizational development and toward artistic creativity. Collectively, the recommendations reflect a belief that the role of the creative artist must be central to any fresh cultural policy initiatives.

While the committee concedes that there are a great many foreign influences on Canadian culture, it is critical of past policy under which "we have thrown open our borders to foreign cultural products and not given ourselves sufficient opportunity to enjoy the fruits of our own cultural labour".

The response in the report to this dilemma "is not to come down on the side of protectionism, but rather to press home the point as forcefully as we can that federal cultural policy has largely favoured physical plant and organizational development over artistic creativity and achievement. If we fail to make the stimulation of our own creative imagination as the heart of our cultural policies, we will continue to live in a country dependent on the products of other cultures and we will never elevate life in Canada to a space essentially its own".

With this view, the report strongly recommends continued Canadian content regulations for FM and AM radio and television programming. The report also recommends more government spending for the purchase of contemporary Canadian art and for the presentation of Canadian works in the performing arts and suggests the government help in other areas of record production and marketing.

Change institutions

Sweeping changes are recommended for three of Canada's cultural institutions:



Karen Kain in the National Ballet of Canada production of Don Juan.



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