



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
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THE PROJECTION OF CANADA ABROAD

An address by Mr. R.M. Macdonnell, Deputy Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, to the Twelfth Conference on Canadian Information Abroad, at the Seigneury Club, Montebello, Quebec, on November 20, 1958.

I greatly appreciate the honour of your invitation to address this Conference on Canadian Information Abroad, and I should like to say how much Mr. Norman Robertson, the Under-Secretary, regrets his inability to be present. These peaceful surroundings provide a setting of quiet charm for the examination of problems in which we all have lively interest and which, I am told, have been known in other places to generate emotion as well as understanding.

In such a gathering of experts in the information field, the non-expert - and I am certainly one - may seem out of place. Nevertheless, if it is agreed that business representatives and government officials can with advantage exchange ideas on the problems and possibilities of information work abroad - and this much seems to be agreed - some comments on the role of government services are required from someone. It will be my endeavour to submit these comments for your consideration.

I think you will agree that if this Conference is to be useful, it must not only explore and discuss, but must try to achieve understanding and co-operation between business and government representatives in the promotion of Canadian interests abroad. My Department and, I am sure, the other departments and agencies, in association with which the business of Canadian Government information is carried out abroad, earnestly welcome all constructive approaches to that problem.

It is a truism that public information has become part of the machinery of international relations. How does a government, or how should a government, go about promoting its interests abroad through the use of information? The

objectives are of two kinds, the particular and the general, and the particular are easier to explain than the general. There will not be a great deal of argument about the desirability of fostering the export of Canadian farm, forest, fishery and factory products. The same is true, at periods when immigrants are being sought, about taking steps to encourage desirable immigrants to come forward. There may be disputes about methods and the amount of money that should be spent but the objective is clear and generally acceptable. Moreover, the results can to some degree be measured.

Where there is less clarity and agreement is in the business of making the country known and understood abroad. The general objective of helping the rest of the world to understand what makes us tick, why we react as we do, what are the reasons for our domestic or international actions - this general objective can be interpreted in many ways. Some point to the risks of wasting time and money and hold that it is of little consequence what Asians or Latin Americans or anyone else, except perhaps our neighbours in the United States, think about Canadians and their policies. Others would double or treble the funds now available and would project a great many more aspects of Canadian life than is done at present. There is room here for much divergence of opinion, but the view has gained ground steadily since the war that Canadian policies will be more readily respected and accepted abroad if we explain them and the facts behind them not merely to governments, but to public opinion.

In this regard, and to provide an element of continuity, I should like to quote from an address given by Mr. L.D. Wilgress, then Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, exactly six years ago to a similar conference here in Montebello.

" Unless Canada can secure the co-operation of other countries, we are not going to get very far in working out the kind of world that Canadians want. We cannot hope, nor should we want, to impose ideas on others. But if we are to seek the co-operation of other governments, it is not enough to speak as government to government. The public opinion on which those other governments rest must know something about us, what we stand for, how we do things, in general what our record looks like. At a General Assembly of the United Nations, the late Fiorello LaGuardia, speaking on behalf of the United States Government in a debate on post-war relief and rehabilitation, said that his delegation was prepared to accept any solution of a particular problem proposed by the Canadian Government because of its record of responsibility and good judgment in that field. It should be our objective to make our country's record known and to tell a complete story - not concentrating on the exceptional and the extreme,

but giving a balanced picture of what is broadly characteristic. In other words, we have our share of difficulties as well as our achievements."

Against this background, let me speak in more specific terms about information policy as seen from the Department of External Affairs.

First, a word about the limitations under which government information must operate. An obvious limitation is the fact that the information we dispense seldom, if ever, makes news. A single well-timed statement such as Prime Minister Diefenbaker's last year, at Dartmouth, can do more to focus attention in the United States on the problems of Canadian - United States relations than all our representatives could achieve in a year of work. It is reasonable to think, however, that the result would not have been nearly as effective had it not been for the time spent by our Embassy and consulates in recent years, in preparing public opinion for just such a contingency.

A second limitation derives from the fact that the role of government information is, by and large, supplementary to existing channels through which people in other countries obtain their impressions of Canada. A last but important limitation arises from the territorial scope of our operations, with consequent staff and budgetary implications.

These factors, and others, affect our activities in two distinct ways: first, our planning and execution are tied to a system of priorities: of geographical areas, of themes and of media. Secondly, our information service is chiefly responsive, which for us is not a synonym for inactive. Its main job is to use every opportunity that arises to make Canada better known and liked, to create a context of understanding and sympathy in which, when the need arises, Canadian policy may be properly interpreted, new developments correctly assessed, and Canadian interests usefully promoted.

The bulk of the impressions that people in many foreign countries receive about Canada come to them through international news, picture, radio and television organizations, through business connections, through labour, educational and cultural associations, through the exchange of visitors and students, through international professional contacts, through private correspondence and in many other ways. While the Government plays only a limited part in this constant flow of impressions, they pose for its information services numerous tasks of interpretation or elaboration required for an accurate and balanced portrayal of Canada. It is to this supplementary task that we address ourselves in countries where press communications and all manner of exchanges with this country are well developed. In other countries, we have the additional task of providing the basic news and information which is lacking, and of promoting closer contacts with Canada

through appropriate cultural activities.

If the Government is not concerned with providing rapid press services, it does, however, keep its officers abroad supplied with full texts of important statements and other documents, with publications and reference photographs, films and radio transcriptions, books for library use and presentation, briefly, with the information materials needed by each mission to interpret policy, correct misconceptions, and deal with enquiries and requests from foreign government departments, press organizations, writers, schools and public. On our officers in the field at diplomatic posts, at separate trade missions, and at offices of the Film Board, on the CBC-IS and the Travel Bureau, rests the burden of this effort. Their knowledge of local conditions, needs and possibilities plays an essential part in shaping our information programmes, and our own efforts are directed to helping them make the most of their opportunities. Co-operating in this task is a team comprised chiefly of Trade and Commerce, Immigration, the National Film Board, the CBC International Service, the Exhibition Commission, the Travel Bureau and External Affairs, whose varied efforts are co-ordinated through the Inter-Departmental Committee on Canadian Information Abroad. All this represents, you will agree, an impressive sum of talent, effort and money devoted to achieving the objectives I have described.

Now in this effort to create a balanced picture of Canada in the minds of foreign peoples, what are the themes we develop? Generally speaking, our record of working for peace as a responsible member of the international community, and our willingness to help less-developed countries, provide good and true copy. At the United Nations, our work on disarmament and in the Security Council, our participation in the Emergency Force in the Middle East and in the Truce Observation Commission in Kashmir, are a few examples of the constantly active support Canada has given to the organization and its Specialized Agencies. In Europe, our Brigade Group in Germany and our fighter squadrons in France, as well as the shipments of arms to our European allies, testify to our active participation in the NATO alliance as to our determination to defend ourselves against any threat of aggression until the United Nations is strong enough to do the job for which it was created. In the Commonwealth countries, our considerable investment in Colombo Plan aid and technical assistance, our aid to new members such as Ghana and the West Indies Federation, and initiatives such as the recent Trade and Economic Conference, show our sincere desire to strengthen the bonds of Commonwealth co-operation and solidarity.

In the United States, our relations of all kinds, political, economic, social and military, supply a wide range of problems and information topics. In other countries, Canada's industries and the size of its commerce, its schools

and cultural activities are useful topics, but of even greater interest are events that occur in the developing relations between Canada and each one of these countries.

These are the basic themes we publicize in many lands, and in several languages. We do it through the use of all the press media, as well as exhibitions, speeches and personal contacts. We try to adapt our material and methods to the conditions and people of each country, and as far as possible we work through the nationals of these countries. We try not to boast or talk down to people; we do not seek to impose our ideas, but we watch for every opportunity to let the record speak for itself. As to facilities, our resources are generally sufficient for our present tasks. But progress has been made, or so we think, in the quality of our materials and in the accuracy and balance of our programmes. We shall continue to work on that.

I have sketched here an outline of the purpose, organization and operation of Canadian Government information abroad. That is only part of the story, for a complete picture of Canadian activities abroad would emphasize the very considerable amount of advertising and other publicity which Canadian firms undertake outside the country, particularly in the United States. This we find helpful especially in trying to get across the idea that Canada is not a vast wilderness peopled largely by Indians and Eskimos, with Mounted Police standing by to collect the taxes we pay to the British Crown, when they are not getting ready for another version of "Rose Marie". These misconceptions are amusing or irritating according to taste but, in any event, are disappearing. There is a more important area of ignorance concerning Canada's development as a nation -- its industrial accomplishments and defence record, its cultural development, its past and present responsibilities in international affairs--which is much less comical, and to which we must address ourselves with imagination and energy. Although they are doing a good job, it isn't fair to leave it all to Wayne and Schuster.

I might now make a few suggestions which have occurred to the Department for improving the effectiveness of information work abroad, and possible ways in which the various business and government organizations might co-operate to their common benefit.

First, I wonder whether we could co-operate to a greater extent in making use of each other's materials. We have just produced a new edition of "Canada from Sea to Sea", a basic booklet on Canada of which you have, I think, a copy. A few years ago, one of the railways had us print 100,000 additional copies of the previous issue for distribution through its offices abroad. We should be glad to extend the same opportunity again to any of you who think

it worthwhile. On our side, we purchased some time ago a few thousand copies (all that were available) of an excellent booklet put out by the Northern Electric Company, and more recently, an attractive booklet produced by Canadian General Electric was reprinted by Citizenship and Immigration for use abroad. My Department is now considering a similar step. Would there not be more opportunities for useful exchanges of this nature?

In this connection, I wonder if Canadian industry is not overly modest in telling other countries about its accomplishments. I am thinking particularly of the part played by Canadian industry in making their facilities available for technical training to Colombo Plan students, and in industrial and production work undertaken in Canada for the benefit of Asian countries. The Government is doing its best to spread information about the Colombo Plan through pictures and newspaper stories about the trainees which are forwarded to the countries concerned, but it seems to me that in its own interest Canadian industry might share effectively in this work. Our missions in the countries concerned would be glad to help in securing outlets.

My Department, perhaps others also, has a programme of assistance to visiting foreign journalists which, though modest, is nevertheless an important source of foreign public knowledge of Canada. We have in the past, according to the interest displayed by the visitor, arranged visits to certain industries where they were cordially welcomed and shown around. It would help if we had a list of all the industries interested in receiving such visitors, so that we might approach them when planning our itineraries.

Turning to the United States, and without going into details which may be the subject of our discussions, I should like to mention three information projects which might be of some interest to all of us. The first is the nation-wide "Canada Month" of study and games to be undertaken by the Cub Scouts of America, their parents and leaders. The Government has provided the literature required for this purpose, including travel booklets and a specially designed folder of which you have a copy. Their theme (The Mounties) is not perhaps original, but this is an instance where, bowing to the inevitable, we have to use the Mounted Police as a stalking horse, so to speak.

The second project is on a different level and presumably of wider interest. "Canada Week in Boston" next April should be an elaborate show, comprising as it does a Canadian trade exhibit and an impressive number of cultural, educational and entertainment events.

Lastly, our participation in the Chicago Fair next July will perhaps attract the co-operation of some of you. This is an area which offers, according to our Consul General, Gerry Newman, the possibility of expanded Canadian trade. It is also, as you recall, one of the areas referred to in the Batelle Report which the Conference discussed two years ago.

In the work we are doing abroad, all of us have an opportunity of telling the story of Canada's accomplishments and promise. It is an inspiring story, and in many respects unique. Our information services try to tell that story in its various aspects and in different ways, not for the sheer joy of telling an adventurous story - for that is only an incidental part of their function - but in order to enlist understanding and acceptance of a wide variety of things Canadian - products, policies and points of view. At times, I suppose, they even support some of our national prejudices, such as a prejudice in favour of being Canadian. Working in co-ordinated fashion, as a team, the Government information services contribute a sum total of effort that is impressive, and the result in terms of understanding and goodwill is important and cumulative. It seems to me that Canadian business has much to gain by participating wherever it can in building up such a fund whose benefits are continuing and available to all. I hope that we may at this Conference, be able to take some positive steps in that direction.

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