

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES



INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 51/26 THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
IN THE ARTS, LETTERS AND SCIENCE

An address by the Chairman, The Right Honourable Vincent Massey, P.C., C.H., entitled "What are we Defending", delivered to the Canadian Club, Montreal, June 11, 1951.

I have been concerned for two years with an unusual national inquiry which ... was recently completed.

...This has been a novel enterprise, carrying us 10,000 miles across Canada; but not the length of the journey, nor even the breadth of the task have given this inquiry its significance. This significance, it seems to me, is due to the interpretation given to what we were attempting by the 1,200 witnesses who appeared before us, and the 460 odd briefs which they presented. Our formal agenda was, of course, prescribed by the literal terms of the Order-in-Council which brought us into being; but this agenda was given vitality and realism by the public who understood at once with a sure instinct the deeper meaning of what we were about.

The submissions we received covered almost every part of our national life. Indeed, when it is realized that those appearing before us included the three largest religious bodies in Canada, the great trade unions, the Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade, the national agricultural organizations, the principal associations of women, the universities, national organizations of workers in the arts, it will be seen that most of the people of Canada were directly or indirectly represented. But we heard, of course, not only from national bodies. Wherever we went, local groups of busy people interested in the arts took the time to come to our hearings, telling us something of what they were doing, of their problems, and with a modest pride, of what their communities were able to do in music, in painting or in the theatre. Moreover, the members of the Commission itself, represented different regions of Canada and had had varied experience as Canadians. Though my colleagues and I not infrequently in our discussions had brisk and spirited exchanges of thought, we reached, I think, a striking measure of unanimity in our findings and in our proposals.

About the briefs I should like to say two things. In the first place, the great majority of persons making submissions were not professionally concerned with the arts, or literature, or science. They were ordinary citizens interested in these things because they attached importance to them. Secondly, the briefs showed a high degree of responsible thinking. What we heard came from serious minded persons whose approach to the problems was enthusiastic but

balanced and disinterested. There was a wide response to the inquiry because its subjects affect everybody; any account of our efforts is therefore not the report of an academic project but is, in the real sense of the phrase, a human interest story. Had you heard, as we did, from a group interested in painting, which held its exhibitions in the basement of the fire-hall (though they could not always count on this), or from amateur players who rehearsed in a garage, or from a choral society which practised in a small room in the Town Hall when it was not wanted for something else, you would have been struck as we were by the enthusiasm and the energy with which the arts are cherished, often under what would be discouraging conditions, throughout the country.

Now, what were we about, and what was the purpose of this inquiry? It seems to me that, underlying the Terms of Reference, were certain ideas, or notions, or assumptions and these I would like to discuss briefly with you.

We were of course instructed to examine and make recommendations upon certain institutions of the Federal Government, and upon other precise matters related to the national interest; and this we have done, as you may have noticed, in 146 recommendations of varying importance. But implied in the inquiry and giving coherence to what we have proposed (and indeed, justifying the creation of the Commission in the first place) there existed certain fundamental assumptions.

One assumption which no doubt led to the establishment of this inquiry, and which certainly was often impressed upon us throughout its course, was that a nation should be something more than an economic and political structure. Political and economic factors are naturally of obvious importance in any community. A man must be concerned with how his town is governed, or the balance of trade; but what really gives a people its character is what the citizen thinks about, and that in turn depends on what he reads, and what he sees and on the programmes he hears. It may be that we have been inclined to neglect the importance of these non-material things, and if this is in fact true, it should be a matter of national concern.

A second assumption is closely related to the first. In most countries, literature, music, the arts, are not only symptoms, but at the same time are effective causes of a strong sense of community which in times of peace or peril is a nation's greatest asset. In this country too the arts are now, but can be to a greater degree, one of the most effective unifying forces.

There is a third assumption: although it is said that we live in a "scientific age", civilizations in the western world are still measured by their writers, artists and philosophers. The mechanical achievements of Imperial Rome were impressive in their time; but Rome's influence upon later civilization has been through its writers and its law-givers whose work continued to be important long after the temples and aqueducts of the Imperial city had fallen into ruin. This third assumption then, consists in the notion that we should remember how easy it is to confuse the means of civilization with civilization itself. Is it fair to point out that in Canada we have most of the world's nickel and, as yet, no national library?

These and no doubt other kindred reflections led to the creation of the Royal Commission, and these and similar thoughts have been much in our minds throughout our long inquiry, and our many talks together. There is, however, one further assumption which I imagine embraces the others. This is that nationalism, and more particularly Canadian nationalism, is not an obsolete notion. Our work, and whatever may stem from it, rests upon the conviction that Canada is to remain an independent nation, and that in consequence it is the right and the duty of our governments and of our citizens to do all that is possible under the law and under the constitution to strengthen our sense of Canadianism. I know that for a generation it has been fashionable to decry "nationalism". I am, however, not convinced that in doing what we can to strengthen and to enrich our own national life we are doing any disservice to the international cause. On the contrary, it seems to me that for many a year, and even for many a generation to come, we can do our best service to the world at large by "rightly ordering our own household"; and our inquiry has revealed, to us at least, that there is much right ordering to be done.

We make no apology, therefore, for having had as our main preoccupation throughout the manner in which the Federal Government and its various agencies may best serve the people of Canada and best promote our sense of national consciousness, with respect for the Constitution, and within those important fields with which we were concerned. This is not to say, however, that we have considered such matters only as means to the desirable end of national unity. Rather is it true that by creating the conditions in which the "civilizing arts" may prosper, we shall at the same time be establishing the best and perhaps the only basis for our national unity and our national greatness.

Such then have been, I think, the principal ideas or assumptions which led to this inquiry, and which, in any event, have been much in our minds. I should like now to discuss with you in a general way some of the more striking things which emerged from our work.

First of all, in examining certain activities and institutions in our country in the fields of art, literature and science, it at once became clear to us that we were exploring the very foundations of Canadian life, and that on these foundations alone, as I have suggested, Canadian unity must rest. Many of these forces which have made Canada a nation belong, of course, to the material sphere. Physical links are essential to our coherence -- railways, road, airlines -- but true unity belongs to the realm of ideas. We thought it very significant to hear representatives of our two Canadian cultures express repeatedly the belief that, in our common cultivation of the mind, Canadians, English- and French-speaking, can find true Canadianism. At this point I should like to pay a very sincere tribute to the part played in our common effort by my French-speaking fellow Canadians, many of whom are no doubt listening.

Mesdames, Messieurs,

A titre de président de la Commission royale, je tiens à exprimer ici à mes compatriotes de langue française, qui ont participé d'une façon ou d'une autre à l'oeuvre de la Commission, toute la reconnaissance que je leur garde pour l'apport essentiel qu'ils ont fourni à notre tâche commune. Cet apport ne fut pas seulement la preuve du rôle éminent

de la culture propre au Canada de langue française, mais il aussi illustré, de façon irréfutable, leur foi dans l'avenir d'un Canada uni.

In the second place, throughout our journeys and at our many public sessions we were much impressed by the prevailing "Canadian" note which we heard again and again. What we found was a positive Canadianism, quite different from the negative approach of former days. We heard expressions not of what Canada is not, but of what Canada is or should be. I can best describe what we found as a growing desire for self-reliance.

If we have a new sense of self-reliance today, we need it. In our inquiry, we were made constantly aware of Canada's geographical pattern. This, of course, was no discovery. The physical facts of our country serve as a backcloth to any study of Canada. We all know the design pretty well. First, we occupy half a continent with a small and widely scattered population. Secondly, our few millions are clustered along the border of another country with many times our population and far greater material strength. Thirdly, most Canadians share their mother tongue with their huge neighbour, and this leads to very close and intimate relations. Many countries have one, and some two of these conditions. Canada is unique in possessing all three.

The effect of these factors on our cultural life is of arresting importance. For one thing, the isolations of our vast country, the harsh accidents of distance, demand a stiff price. In Canada, all national organizations for whatever purpose are very costly to operate and national meetings expensive to organize. Yet with us they are doubly needed. In the business world, commercial associations apply their resources to maintain permanent secretariats and to hold regular, well-attended meetings. In the cultural field, however, we have still to learn that we must pay a premium too; for here, as well as in the material sphere, we are constantly fighting geography.

Geography affects also the work of government institutions. National agencies such as our museums, galleries or archives have certain responsibilities which lie a long way from Ottawa. A group from the Prairies said in its brief as we have recorded: "It is with considerable amusement that we read under the heading of 'National Museum' that it is centrally located and readily reached by bus and streetcar". It was a good-natured joke but its implications were important. It reminded us again of the challenge and of the problems which stem from Canada's size and shape.

I have referred to internal geographical difficulties. Throughout our work we were made constantly aware of an external problem, a problem suggested by a witness who reminded us that, "Canada is the only country of any size in the world whose people read more foreign periodicals than they do periodicals published in their own land". But magazine literature is only one of many cultural channels from across the border. The impact of our great neighbour on our own national life is a subject both complex and delicate. But it cannot be evaded in any review of Canadian development.

We have gained much from this close contact. For one thing, we are deeply indebted to American generosity.

In the last forty years the Carnegie Corporation, and the Rockefeller Foundation have spent in Canada nearly twenty million dollars. This money has been expended with wisdom to help us to strengthen our cultural and scholarly life, to enable us to have the equipment we need as a nation. These great bodies have indeed helped us to live fuller lives as Canadians. The broad benevolence of our neighbours has also opened wide the doors of American Universities to Canadian students, and through scholarships has given them access to specialized institutions of all kinds. All these are freely placed at our disposal. I wonder whether many of us realize the extent of our dependence on our friends. Whether we should have done more of these things for ourselves and should not have relied so heavily on the generosity of others is a different matter. (One important Canadian body in the field of scholarship today derives all its funds from the United States.)

A final word about the inquiry: it is abundantly clear that the departments of Canadian life which we have reviewed have not suffered in the past from over nourishment. No appraisal of our cultural progress can leave us complacent or even content. There are a good many reasons for this state of affairs. I have mentioned some of them, vast distances, a dispersed population, easy dependence on a near and generous neighbour; there is also our relative youth as a nation and our preoccupation with pioneering tasks. But whatever the causes, it must be apparent that we have arrears to make up.

Well, gentlemen, I have spoken to you about certain of the concepts which underlay our task and about certain of the problems which our inquiry revealed. Now, what of our recommendations? These proposals stem, of course, partly from the assumptions which were made and, to a more important degree, from the evidence with which our fellow-citizens have so generously and honestly provided us. It will be apparent to you that what we have tried to do depends upon our conviction that the enduring things in the life of a nation cannot be weighed or measured, that these unseen elements are not only essential in themselves but must exist as a prelude to national action in any form. We remarked in our report that when Mr. Churchill in 1940 called the British people to their supreme effort, he invoked the common traditions of his fellow-countrymen, and based his appeal on the origins from which had come their character and way of life. In the spiritual heritage of Great Britain was found the quickening force to meet the brute facts of that hour of danger. Nothing could have been more "practical" than such an appeal to thought and emotion. My point, of course, is that what really gives a people its character and its confidence lies among the intangibles; and, in the words of a recent writer, the culture - that difficult and misleading word - of a nation consists in the assumptions, the judgments, the tastes and the habits of its citizens. These must depend, if I may repeat, upon the quality of what people listen to and read and discuss and consider important, so that in peace or in time of danger a man may know clearly what he cherishes or what he is defending. The British people knew in 1940.

What then have we proposed? It has seemed clear to us that two things are needed to produce in Canada a reasonable balance between the attention we pay to physical accomplishments and to the other less concrete but, you

will I trust agree, the more enduring part of our civilization. The first must, of course, be the will to quicken our cultural and intellectual life. Our inquiry has made clear that this desire is real and widespread.

The second essential is money. If we are to have a fuller and better cultural fare this will cost something; and it has been our view that the Federal Government should accept some share, with our other governments, of this cost. Now, a word about money. This is a subject on which there may have been some misunderstanding. It is of course true that the financial support which we have recommended for the CBC, for the universities and for a national system of scholarships would require substantial sums; but if the CBC is to do its job, if the universities are to continue to play their essential role, and if we are not to squander our human resources by barring able young Canadians from the universities because they are too poor to go there, these are surely legitimate and necessary expenditures in the national interest, and these three would in fact together cost each year rather less than what we pay for five heavy bombers. But to implement our other recommendations we do not see that any great amounts will be necessary. As I remarked earlier, in forty years two American Foundations have spent in Canada about twenty million dollars. As you see, the annual sum has not been great, but the effect of this wisely expended money upon the life of our country has been incalculable. It is something of this sort that we have in mind, and not at all a cornucopia, pouring forth the taxpayer's money in reckless bounty. You will no doubt recall the practice of the great American trusts which often provide funds to initiate projects and to maintain them for a very few years until the appropriate local body can take them over. It is thus our view that relatively modest sums, carefully spent to assist voluntary organizations and for the other purposes which we have discussed, could produce astonishing returns on the investment.

I need hardly remind you that rarely in history has the artist been fully self-sustaining. In the modern world the state has assumed an increasing interest in the well-being or at least the survival of its creative artists. The principle of course has been established in France since the First Republic and before. Even in Great Britain, so loyal to the voluntary principle where cultural life for long has been the beneficiary of private wealth, the state has steadily intervened, as funds from traditional sources have dried up. But state intervention in Great Britain has happily left the artist free and unhampered. Through the traditional English instinct for compromise, drama, music, painting are now subsidized through the body which makes available for these purposes large sums from the public treasury without the danger of either political interference or bureaucratic control.

We have recommended in our Report the establishment of a similar body adapted to Canadian conditions. If it is created we would have a Council, subject of course to Parliament, with important advisory functions and some administrative freedom to perform a number of essential services. It would be the channel through which moderate sums could be made available to increase the effectiveness of voluntary bodies working in the arts and literature. It would make possible the movement through Canada of

Canadian musicians, or players, to areas which otherwise could never hear or see them. It would serve to effect cultural exchanges with other countries which at present find no Canadian organization available to respond to their approaches. It would administer a limited number of scholarships in the non-scientific sphere with which hitherto the Federal Government has not been concerned. It would make grants to Canadian scholars and artists to enable them to do creative work, complementing American benevolence on which we have so far largely depended.

As our task reached its conclusion we found ourselves working against a darkening international horizon. Our recommendations have been shaped with a full realization of the difficulties and dangers of the time we live in. We have tried to keep what we propose within appropriate limits. But in the light of present day conditions, what is appropriate and essential?

The most striking items in governmental budgets today are related to defence. This is a matter rightly high in the thoughts and responsibilities of statesmen. That may suggest to the citizen that however important the subject of our inquiry may have been in normal times its consideration may well now be delayed until the sky is clearer. In other words, is the weather right for the launching of such a ship? This calls for another question. If we as a nation are concerned with defence what, we must ask ourselves, are we defending? It is obvious that we are defending civilization, particularly our share of it and our conception of it. The things with which our inquiry had to deal are those which give our civilization its meaning and character; and those, must surely be not only protected but strengthened.

We take for granted that the young men in our services understand the meaning of democracy. When we find that they haven't thought much about it we organize classes for a few weeks to tell them about the foundations of our civilization and such classes are doubtless useful and indeed necessary, but the articles of our faith cannot be learned in a hurry. Propaganda is no substitute for education. The spiritual weapons we need in times of stress and danger must be slowly forged and tempered in time of peace. For this reason as for no other we must protect and reinforce those permanent instruments which embody our traditions and keep them alive. Hence our conviction that the universities must be strengthened to preserve our heritage of freedom, truth and tolerance. The University is the power-house of the ideas which we cherish and which we shall defend. Thus, too, we must encourage the free ranging work of the scholar and of the artist, because what they are doing is also what we are protecting. Neglect all these things and we reduce the difference between us and the enemy. We shall be less able to fight materialism if we become materialistic ourselves.

Now gentlemen, I must not keep you longer. I have tried to suggest the meaning and purpose of our task and the impression it has made upon us. We have proposed that certain measures should be considered so that in Canada the things of the mind and of the heart may be nourished. We feel that these are even more important now than in those peaceful times which have gone and which perhaps we may never see again.

You will perhaps recall that moving passage in Jules Romain's greatest work where the writer, musing on the horror before Verdun, tries to discover why the French held out, and why the fortress was not taken; in his mind, he moves among the men in their ruined trenches and records their thoughts and feelings; finally he notes "the man who says: 'All that matters to me in this world is the language of France, the cathedrals of our French countryside, the quays of the Seine, landscapes that can be found nowhere else in the world, a way of life that is unique. If all that is to be taken away, life has no longer any point.....' "Picture to yourself" he writes, "trench after trench filled with men thinking such thoughts, and you will find the answer to your question.... That is why Verdun still stands."

It seems to me, gentlemen, that here we may discover what you and I have in mind in our reflections together; I hope you may agree with me that the invisible elements of our national life can inspire a like attitude, so that when a similar question is asked here, the answer will be forthcoming in terms no less moving, and as true.

Twenty-three hundred years ago in Athens, a Greek historian pondered the same question. He too concluded that men will give everything they possess for their land and what they cherish if without these life would not be worth living. In the great speech in which his thoughts are recorded he said to his fellow citizens: "You must yourselves realize the power of Athens and feed your eyes upon her from day to day till love of her fills your hearts and until all her greatness shall break upon you". We would no doubt express ourselves differently and with greater reserve; but with nothing less than this should we be content: that a man may think about this country with like emotion and that what we are defending may be as clear to us as it was to the citizens of that little state so many centuries ago.

S/A