



# THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA MONTHLY LETTER

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## *Let Us Enjoy Our Freedoms*

WHY IS IT so much more satisfying to fight for freedom than to enjoy it? Why is it so exciting to battle for emancipation, so tedious to have it? Why does a man possess dignity in his efforts to win a freedom and feel slightly ridiculous when he talks about that freedom afterward?

The gaining of freedom should not be like that. To establish freedom is only the beginning, like the opening of a door. The effort is not worth while unless we find something that deserves treasuring, using and enjoying.

Our civilization is the first one in history that has not been based on slave labour. This is unquestionably a great advance, not only morally but in its contribution to our self-respect and welfare. Dr. Albert Schweitzer told the story in *African Notebook* about a well-to-do woman who visited his hospital accompanied by four slaves. The next day Dr. Schweitzer met her while she was gathering wood, and asked her why she had to carry her own firewood, since she had four slaves. She replied: "Having slaves does not mean that one is well served." So not only are the slaves free, but we are free of having slaves: to depend upon our own efforts is to develop ourselves and to be free.

At this stage in the twenty-first great civilization the earth has known, the list of our freedoms would run to many pages. Every time we say out loud what we like or dislike, every time we choose a book to read, every time we change jobs, every time we go to a religious service, every time we turn our radio or television to a station of our choice, every time we go to a meeting of a political party, every time we rise in a Home and School Association meeting to contribute our thoughts about education, we are doing something that can be done only in a free country.

We take all this for granted without realizing how greatly we should miss any part of it if it were taken from us. We are not really experiencing full enjoyment of the benefits we have: benefits which are the outcome of a struggle as long as human history.

To make the best of our freedoms we must become an intelligent, educated, informed citizenry, acquainted with the values, privileges and responsibilities of our Canadian way of life.

The word "freedom" has many shades of meaning. Depending upon its context it stands for political liberty, personal liberty, non-slavery, independence, or the power of self-determination. It implies more than mere liberty, for it demands insurance and protection by provident institutions such as governments which secure us from arbitrary subjection. Thomas Hobbes said in his great treatise *The Leviathan*: "A freeman is he that, in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to do."

Some people go too far. They do not discriminate between freedom and license. Freedom requires a certain self-mastery, in which reason restrains impulses and passions, and subordinates to a larger freedom the liberty to do just what one pleases.

### *The Rule of Law*

What are the established aims of Canadian society? They had their birth thousands of years ago in the yearning of men and women for something better than the perilous gratifications of animal existence; they were nurtured on the teaching of great spiritual leaders; they were modified by the practical experience of co-existence, and they represent today the permanent advantages of human fellowship under an accepted code of behaviour.

The Rule of Law is a great ideal, with the will of the people as the source of its authority. Freedom is not liberty for everyone to do what he pleases without being subject to any law. It is freedom of man to have a standing rule to live by, common to everyone in his society. It is freedom within bounds rather than wholly anarchic freedom. It consents to curtailment of some natural or savage liberties so that the human spirit may rejoice in greater, wider freedom.

The Rule of Law means that there is one law for all men, that all men are equal before it, and that no man can be punished except for the breach of it. It reconciles social order with individual freedom and initiative. It means that the government itself is not above law, and that it respects the independence of the



courts and the safeguards of the citizen's liberties. Only Parliament can alter law, and Parliament is the people.

### *Good government*

Freedom is built on the foundation of good government. Democracy in Canada is limited by being made constitutional and representative, so as to prevent the exercise of tyranny. Of the countries of the world, Canada has the eighth oldest written constitution, the second oldest one of a federal nature, and the oldest which combines federalism with the principles of responsible government.

It provides the means whereby errors may be corrected legally and not by force; it gives the right to elect representatives by secret ballot and to be taxed only by elected representatives. The Canadian way allows complaints to be freely aired, requires that they be deeply considered, and provides for speedy redress. Every minority, no matter how small, has the right to dissent, and to oppose under the law, the proposals of the majority. It assumes that when decisions have been arrived at by free choice after rational debate the citizens shall abide by them.

Essential to freedom is the participation of the governed in determining their own welfare. They need to use the vote which is a mark of living in a free society.

The duty to vote is a duty to equip oneself to vote, and everyone is under the obligation to understand our way of government. Democracy is not a magic formula by which wise decisions are extracted from blind ignorance.

Probably no finer plea has ever been written for freedom than that of John Stuart Mill in 1859, but he had a warning also: "A people may prefer a free government, but if, from indolence or carelessness or cowardice, or want of public spirit, they are unequal to the exertions necessary for preserving it . . . they are unlikely long to enjoy it."

Today's is the most dangerous civilization physically that man ever concocted for himself. People in all countries are in the throes of shifting their outlook. Many things are being revalued under the titles "new" and "modern". The compulsion of tradition has lost its force, and the compulsion of restlessness has taken over. There is a nonconformist spirit abroad in the world. It is suspicious of leaders and successful men. It responds readily to the appeals of revivalists, with more heat than light.

To preserve and enjoy freedom in such circumstances demands that we appreciate the difference between thinking and herd opinion.

To avert the circumstances which give rise to unrest, governments need to anticipate, to introduce reforms demanded by profound social changes. To make governments operative in this way, citizens need to participate actively in choosing and advising those whom they elect to govern.

It is, in the last analysis, the people — all the people — who decide what freedoms they shall enjoy. Even in the last extremity, in time of war, the consent of the people to limitations on their freedom must be given through their representatives in Parliament.

### *Some freedoms to enjoy*

The most important aspect of freedom is freedom of the mind. A democracy can endure and make happiness possible for its people only if its citizens are permitted freedom to question and to doubt.

But, as someone said wittily, freedom to think cannot help unless you use your head. To think is to compare things with one another, to notice wherein they agree and disagree. It is the reverse of the indolent way of approving your group's guide-book to values without confronting them with other views.

Freedom of thought, in any valuable sense, includes freedom of speech. Canada has staked its future on the belief that in the free market-place of thought, by the matching of ideas, truth has a better chance of winning than by any other method known to man.

The right to discuss things extends to all the people of Canada. If a man does not like the government, he can stand up and say so. He may state his opinions freely and openly on all public matters without fear of being punished or interfered with by the police, government officials or any other person.

A man may speak wrongly or foolishly, yet a denial of his right to do so is a denial of his freedom, but free speech is not the same thing as free shouting. You may not, in the name of free speech, prevent others from being heard.

Neither is it true that freedom to speak without prior permission means that a person may say what he likes. If he is libellous or seditious or blasphemous or obscene, he can afterwards be made liable for it. Authority does not declare his ideas wrong, but it does declare certain acts unlawful.

The newspapers and other media have the same right to state their opinions on public questions as any citizen has. Freedom of the press means freedom from previous censorship, and not freedom from subsequent prosecution for crimes. The press is free, but it must also be responsible.

Canadians have the right of free association and assembly. They can form all sorts of voluntary associations for purposes in which they are interested without interference by government. These associations, themselves an evidence of freedom of assembly and speech, can be potent forces in helping us to enjoy our freedoms.

When we think of a community we think of it as a place where the people have citizens' interests in common. In his local community the ordinary citizen has his best opportunity to protect his rights and shoulder his responsibilities and make use of his freedoms. There he can most easily influence public



opinion; there he can with greatest enjoyment take a part in matters of public interest.

Peaceable assembly is not sanction of mob rule. Zealots often deny freedom in their actions. A person who goes all out on an impulse or whim to sponsor something, however good it may appear to be, without looking ahead to the cost and the effect, makes himself an essentially ridiculous figure. His emotion becomes, to him, a criterion of truth, and having taken a stand he defends it violently, sustained by an exaggerated conception of his own merits.

### *The law of the land*

We have so much freedom that our liberties must be circumscribed. Laws are vital to the functioning of society, and they must be respected as a condition of freedom. The only alternative to the Rule of Law is the tyranny of the strongest.

The courts of law have been established to ensure that the freedom and security of all persons residing in Canada are not endangered. The formula is: "Every man is free to do that which he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man."

A good law exists to express and to implement our physical, mental and spiritual needs by preserving that balance between the conflicting demands of our self-assertive and social instincts which we have agreed upon as being necessary to our common social life.

Our basic rights before the law are: (1) The right to a fair trial; (2) The right to be considered innocent until proved guilty. No person may be arrested in Canada except for just cause. Upon being arrested he must be informed of the charge against him and allowed to seek the advice and assistance of a lawyer. His trial must be held within a reasonable time in open court.

There are no secret police in Canada. The police officers are public servants. There is one common system of criminal law for the whole country. The judiciary is independent, not in the sense of being free from all control, but independent because of being free from improper influence.

Freedom in employment is part of the Canadian way. Not one of the 500,000 babies born in Canada every year comes labelled "clerk, toolmaker, computer programmer, executive, hand labourer." Every one has the liberty to choose his profession or job.

New inventions and rapid industrial development give individuals the opportunity to rise from job to job. A workman is free to demonstrate his skill, responsibility and personal worth. Employees and employers are free to bargain about the terms of employment.

### *Freedom to choose*

Freedom of choice extends to other areas of life. The essence of choice is knowing what is important and what is unimportant, because there can be no

choice without precarious possibilities. It involves the chance of error, and error involves some kind of penalty. The enjoyment of freedom to choose, therefore, is not an unmixed blessing, because it imposes the obligation to be responsible.

It is the spirit of Canadian democracy to provide equal opportunity for all citizens under free institutions and equal laws. This does not confer equality of ability, but freedom to develop and apply ability. It seeks to remove inequalities that are not natural but artificial, so that as far as possible all men may have equal chances to use what natural endowments they possess.

Equality is meaningless to those who enviously ask: "Why should not I enjoy what others enjoy?" without doing what is necessary to earn that enjoyment. Suppose two men to be equally well educated and equally free to progress in business: if one goes to work or studies to improve himself while the other lies abed, what then becomes of equality?

Every citizen has freedom to come and go as he pleases, to travel throughout the country without hindrance, without papers, documents or identification tags. He may change his place of residence as often as he wishes, without reporting to any authority. He may leave the country and return to it.

Among the other freedoms is that of privacy. A civilized man values privacy for himself and in a reciprocal way he extends the enjoyment of privacy to others. He minds his own business, refraining from idle and meddlesome curiosity.

Finally, in this array of freedoms which Canadians are open to enjoy is freedom of religion, the freedom to worship God in the way of one's choice. *Canada Year Book* lists fifteen leading denominations. Although eight out of ten persons stated that they belonged to one of the three numerically largest denominations, there were 3,800,000 other persons professing other faiths.

Religion is the basis of civilized society. Edmund Burke, English statesman, said: "True religion is the foundation of society, the basis on which all true civil government rests, and from which power derives its authority, laws their efficacy and both their sanction."

Religion is the supporter of that morality indispensable to political prosperity, showing its influence in all human conduct.

The religious freedom assured in Canada means not only freedom of worship but the right not to be debarred from holding public offices or from other privileges of citizenship on religious grounds.

### *Tolerance in freedom*

He who wishes to enjoy freedom must give freedom. He must be willing that people differ from him. He may stand aloof from a person who displeases him, but that does not give him the right to make his life uncomfortable. Mill's dictum still stands: "If all



mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind."

Every State contains fussy and pedantic moralists who seek to use its machinery to insist that their habits shall become the official standard of conduct in the population. These are people who count their doctrines more valuable than freedom. They have the delusion of infallibility, and cannot make way for other men's minds.

"Tolerance," said Everett Dean Martin in his book *Liberty*, "is a better guarantee of freedom than brotherly love; for a man may love his brother so much that he feels himself thereby appointed his brother's keeper and regulator."

Understanding is increased by dialogue, by talking things over. Life and knowledge are today so complex that only by free discussion can we pick our way through errors and prejudices.

Dialogue, of course, does not consist of rival lectures. It requires moderation of language, courtesy, intelligent assessment, and listening. The right to talk may be the beginning of freedom, but the necessity of listening is what makes the right important.

### *The dignity in freedom*

Democracy is that system of government which more than any other is predicated upon the dignity of the individual. This is not a dignity imposed by law, or conferred by learning or implied by status. It is the dignity of self-respect and self-development, for self-control is the essence of democratic living. It is the dignity of people who manage themselves so that they do not require outside coercion.

Our forefathers, although failing here and there in some points in the administration of free institutions, were pre-eminent for the time in which they lived. We cannot with impunity set aside the institutions and authorities which for a thousand years have inspired and guarded and dignified our freedoms, but we can improve them and add to them.

Enjoying freedom today precludes our sinking into self-satisfaction. To have the sense of goals accomplished and of affluence possessed engenders boredom, and boredom can bring about the destruction of democracy.

Institutions cannot give or preserve liberty unless men realize that freedom is precious and are willing to exert themselves to keep it alive.

That this is so is a lesson to be instilled in children from their earliest years. This does not mean that education in freedom should become obsessed with the idea of a sanctified and glorified and flag-waving liberty. It should encourage and prepare children to think for themselves, so that they realize that if they

are to be other than machines in the long run they must have learned to control their own actions.

To impart wholesome education is one of the responsibilities of free men. A man cannot be free if he is a hitch-hiker on democracy. We are not galley slaves, but every man has his oar to pull. He has the obligation to impart what he knows of the benefits of freedom to his children, to keep it inviolate for them, and to encourage them in enjoyment of it.

### *About absolute freedom*

No society and no person is so completely free as to refrain from some sort of discipline.

The picture of a lawless savage, running wild in the woods, is wholly fictitious. People have always been subject to forces which restricted their freedom, from the beat of the primitive tomtom to the tick of the atom bomb.

No man can claim a special, private sort of freedom among free men. He is not enjoying freedom if he remains shackled by old prejudices, if he thinks that freedom is a good thing under certain circumstances for certain sorts of people, or if he demonstrates what he conceives to be freedom by cultivating eccentricity. These faults recall in sorrow the remark of Mme Roland, passing the Statue of Liberty on her way to the guillotine: "Ah, Liberty! What crimes are committed in thy name!"

### *Canadianism*

Canadianism is synonymous with freedom. It sponsors and lives with humane laws, civilized manners, beneficial customs, and tender human relations. It provides conditions in which all citizens without discrimination have the greatest opportunities for self-expression.

Canada welcomes as newcomers those who feel the obligation to conform to, and fit into, this nation. They have their own traditions, cultures, and backgrounds, but they are linked with all other Canadians in their love of freedom. They are like the performers in a choral dance who sing together, though each has his particular part and sometimes one voice is heard while the others are silent. Each brings to the chorus something of his own.

It is a good thing in a lover of freedom to be idealistic, enthusiastic, resolute and courageous, and these qualities deserve our respect. But these traits need to be balanced, for the enjoyment of freedom, by reasonableness, good judgment, and kindly consideration for the welfare of others.

Everyone is free to pursue excellence as he understands it, and within democratic freedom like Canada's he may find scope for the exercise of all his potentialities. This is a society in which the enjoyment of freedom by each citizen has no limit except the like freedom of all.