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## *Communication is Vital*

IT IS THE ABILITY to communicate with words that has made man the dominant species on this planet. His tongue and his pen have been the interpreters of his mind, not only to people of his own generation but to those yet unborn.

Men have learned in science and technology the great advantages that come from being able to convey information fully and exactly to one another. They are only beginning to perceive the vital importance of communicating socially and politically.

This is the greatest single problem of the human race, and its solution cannot longer be left to chance. Society can only be understood through communication; it can only stay together as a society by proper communication.

What sort of moral standards and social well-being should we have without communication? We should have no stated principles to which to refer; no mutual hopes to which to cling; no ideals for which to strive. If we are to build a nation or a world in which a variety of cultures are orchestrated together so as to produce a viable social order we need perfected communication to increase understanding in politics, religion, education and living together.

There are also personal values in good communication: growth of knowledge, depth of intelligence, self-fulfilment, and peace of mind.

Communication does not mean simply telling or hearing something. Never before in history did so many people know so much about what is going on in the world. Communication in its vital sense means communion, a sharing of ideas and feelings in a mood of mutuality. The word comes from the Latin *communico*: "to share", and "communication" is "the act of sharing or imparting a share of anything."

We had an example in the International Exhibition of all the world gathered on a thousand acres filled with communication. There were more than sixty nations displaying themselves and studying others, every one knowing that it has a responsibility in the fate of the world.

Personal life satisfaction, as well as national concord, depends upon our communion with other people. No

pleasure has any savour unless we can communicate it to our friends. No merry thought has any significance unless we share it. No flash of wisdom is worth anything unless we disclose it.

Cicero summed it up like this: If a wise man were granted a life of abundance of everything material, so that he had leisure to contemplate everything worth knowing, still if he could not communicate with another human being he would abandon life.

### *Democracy and freedom*

Consider the implications of communication in the great conceptions of democracy and freedom.

It is the undoubted duty of the government to publish and explain its programme truthfully and understandably to its people, and individuals have the duty to express their ideas of what government should be and do.

Democratic institutions are, in the thoughts of Canadians, devices for reconciling social order with individual freedom and initiative, and for making the immediate power of the country's rulers subject to the ultimate power of the citizens. Such an established society can be made to work only if all concerned do their best to share knowledge and confer together.

It is not enough to be conscious of a good programme designed to cure some fault in society. Every public-spirited citizen needs to declare himself. One reason for the apparent success of agitators who deny the virtues in the communion of democracy is that they are highly vocal. They use tricks of oratory, crude appeal, forcefulness of expression, orgies of imagination, and loud repetitions. They seem not to be amenable to the reason so carefully and logically presented by the supporters of the democratic way.

People who proclaim grievances are using a powerful weapon, whether the complaints are justified or not. Championship of the underdog, the oppressed, the imprisoned, even of the failure, is a virtuous trait of our civilization. Partisans of any scheme who misuse this virtue in good people to further their cause cannot be answered by inaction or by namby-pamby methods.

The man or the woman seeking to propagate the best in Canada will not be content merely to demonstrate it according to the rules of logic, nor will he seek to win



support by offering an attractive goody. On the other hand he will not let human needs hang vaguely in the background, to be realized in a distant future. He will propagandize the truth for today and for distant tomorrows.

Propaganda is not a word to be afraid of. It is a method equally available for hideous purposes, as in the stirring up of pogroms, and for merciful purposes, as in the promotion of Christian pacifism. It may appeal to brutal instincts or to the generous tolerant impulses of men.

Rational propaganda is based on truth and is in favour of action that is in harmony with the enlightened self-interest of those to whom it is addressed, while non-rational propaganda is dictated by, and appeals to, passion. Both sorts have flourished at times in the arenas of politics, economics, religion and society.

Hitler, a master propagandist, did not believe in communication. In a speech in Munich in 1923 he said this: "There are two things which can unite men: common ideals and common criminality." He chose the second, and adopted the course of the "big lie". As he wrote in *Mein Kampf*: "The doctrine is wholly correct that the very greatness of the lie is a factor in getting it believed. . . . It will never occur to the broad mass to suspect so large a lie, and the mass will be quite unable to believe that anyone could possibly have the infernal impudence to pervert the truth to such an extent."

Democratic propaganda, on the other hand, has a strong educational and humane note. While making an appeal to reason and to common sense, it tries to get into communion with people. A programme for betterment of the nation which does not take into account the desires of human nature is as sure to fail as the older programmes which sought to make men live in grace without making sure that they had enough to eat.

### *Talking together*

Instead of hurling propaganda at one another as individuals or provinces or nations, the needs of this hour demand that we talk together.

Dialogue is not the noise made by contending individuals or groups. It begins in an act of faith: the assumption that those who converse speak in honesty for the purpose of reaching understanding, and with generosity toward each other. Dialogue is an achievement of civilization. It has assertion, reply and rejoinder, so that thoughts are interpreted, and ideas are combined or blended.

Truth is reached by dialogue. Some people hold to the touching belief that they are the sole possessors of what is perfect in economics, education, religion, or culture — or all four. They will learn through dialogue that disharmony instead of communion between men's minds is likely, in the end, to lead to the ruin of whatever they may believe in.

Dialogue demands that we earn the right to be heard by lending our ears to what others have to say. The only way we can get another person's idea of ourselves and our projects is by listening to him talk.

When we come to the point of presenting our side of the case, we do not start with talking or writing. We begin by analysing the problem, and then follow with gathering facts, organizing the facts, forming an outline, determining what is needed to convey our meaning, throwing it into interesting form, and adding human interest so as to motivate action. Then we may speak or write with assurance.

Sincerity and purpose should show themselves in every sentence. Civilization is possible only through confidence, and to win confidence the words we speak and the things we write must breathe sincerity.

This requires imagination of three kinds: (1) Creative imagination, to see how our proposal contributes to human welfare; (2) Constructive imagination, to put our ideas into attention-winning form; (3) Interpretive imagination, to see ways in which our message may be conveyed most effectively so as to get the desired response.

To illustrate these points, consider the difference between Pericles, the great Athenian orator, and Socrates, the philosopher. Plato brings us Alcibiades declaring that men went away from the oratory of Pericles saying it was very fine, it was very good, and afterwards thinking no more about it; but they went away from hearing Socrates with the point of what he had said sticking fast in their minds.

In communion with others, we start by capturing attention, and then go on to arouse interest, make ideas stick, and indicate some course of desirable action.

We are assisted in this if we turn to account the formula followed by St. Thomas Aquinas, a formula which deserves the close attention of all who speak or write: "yet, but, hence, therefore". Here is an example taken from two pages of a chapter by Aquinas. Recall the difference of opinion you have had with someone, and fill in the blanks appropriately. "Thus what he has said is . . . . . And that it is problematical he makes clear by saying . . . . . But if . . . . . Yet, on the other hand, . . . . . But since . . . . . Then . . . . . And so, even if it be granted that . . . . . , yet there can be no . . . . . And hence the conclusion is that . . . . ."

### *Dealing with facts*

To write or speak with authority demands that we have facts. The survival of a democratic Canada depends upon the ability of large numbers of people to make realistic choices in the light of adequate factual information. When we know about things, and not merely what is said about things, then we are in a position to make choices among them with confidence.

A group of citizens, who had never written anything since their last school composition, took on the job of getting together facts for their neighbours to use in community betterment. They learned more about their community than they had ever dreamed of. Once they started putting their facts on paper they obtained a new and objective measure of the project.



Having gathered a mass of dry facts, we proceed to consider their relative significance. Creative thinking, or application of our critical faculty, is our only guarantee that we shall not be stampeded into unwise action by misjudgment of the importance of facts.

Free and intelligent inquiry does not consist in acting like a television lawyer getting up an argument, looking only for such facts as will bolster his client's case. In their haste to arrive at solutions and remedies, partisans are often guilty of selecting data to fit their doctrines, while neglecting or suppressing contrary data.

What clear-witted men and women seek is that goal of age-long endeavours: truth. The sponsor of a good plan has no fear of truth. He should use his own critical faculty, and try to get other people to use theirs, on what he and his opponents say, and then make judgments.

But what is Truth? Pilate was not jesting when he asked the question, for even now, 1,930 years later, all men have not agreed, and many things which were true yesterday are not so today.

Truth in any subject is to be found only through the confrontation of facts, and the interpretation of facts, as in a dialogue.

We need to know not only our own side of any case, but the opposition, too. The civilized world is steadfast in its confidence that only its principles of government and its ethics of society are the right ones: but a lot of the civilized people may be killed if they ignore the thoughts of the uncivilized.

North Americans are not as well-read as they may think. A report on world communications issued recently by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said that Europeans buy 38 per cent of the world's daily newspapers, and North Americans 23 per cent. The United Kingdom has the world's highest number of copies of daily papers for every 100 people.

But facts do not come only from newspapers. They are to be found, or help in judging them is to be found, in much older writings: the classics, which mean more and more to us as we get older and more mature in our thinking. The person who reads only on the easy level is missing much intellectual pleasure. Any writer who does not force us to think, and provide us with matter about which to think, is not worth bothering about.

### *Plain talk*

Everyone who speaks or writes in support of what he believes has a moral obligation to be intelligible. As Queen Elizabeth said to the King in *Richard III*: "An honest tale speeds best being plainly told."

The heavenly twins of speaking and writing are Simplicity and Clarity, as Beatrice S. Findlay said so well in the C.A.A.E. book *Let's Tell People*. What we are trying to say must be clear-cut in our own minds. We must be sure of what we want our audience to know, and how we want people to act in response to what we tell them. And then we must put all that into unambiguous and appealing words.

Plain talk is necessary because the public has a rather well-based suspicion of schemes that can only be understood and carried out by very clever people. Even if you have the whole secret of human happiness within you, it is useless to society unless you express it in a manner that attracts attention and in language people understand.

This does not mean being drab. Compare the poetic language of Thomas Gray in a passage familiar to everyone with the severe prose language of Thomas Huxley in telling about the same phenomenon, death. Gray wrote:

"Can storied urn or animated bust  
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?"

Huxley wrote: "Whether after the moment of death the ventricles of the heart can be again set in movement . . . is a question to which we must impose a decided negative." Of these passages, Stephen Leacock wrote: "Huxley has here seized the central point of the poet's thought, and expressed it with the dignity and precision of exact science."

Facts about any subject — the Canadian nation or the need for a new municipal water system — can be explained in plain language to plain people in an attractive way if we have the wit to do it and take the time to plan how to get our ideas across.

There are some things, events, and thoughts which it is difficult to reduce to one-dimensional scale, but if the cause we are sponsoring demands obscurity, we can at least be obscure clearly. Bring the arguments out of your depths of thought and make them over so that they mean the same to others as they do to you. A private meaning is in reality no meaning at all.

### *What do you mean?*

A word is not a symbol on paper or a vibration in the air; it is a tool of communication. Every word was at first a stroke of genius; and even today, when it has been used millions of times, its use requires certain intellectual care.

The measure of the good word is meaning. It should be as exact as is required to avoid ambiguity, and it should be appropriate to the understanding level of the person to whom it is addressed.

If we have anything more important to say than William Harvey we may be permitted to use long and learned words. Harvey was the man who revolutionized physiology by pointing out the motion of the heart and blood in animals, defying the prejudices of several centuries. Here is an extract from his treatise, potent with meaning, clear to everyone: "The organ [the heart] is seen now to move, now to be at rest; there is a time when it moves, and a time when it is motionless."

What does a word mean in fact? It doesn't make much difference how long the yard is, or how heavy a pound is: what really is important is that we all mean the same thing when we specify a yard or a pound. When a word kindles the same meaning in the mind of the hearer as in the mind of the speaker, there is successful communion.



Look at the confusion a carelessly-used word may cause. In a dispatch from Tobruk about holding that strong point, the commander, General Auchinleck, used the word "temporarily". He meant "temporarily to strengthen the retreat." The war cabinet thought he meant "temporarily as an isolated fortress to be used as a break-out point."

Some people deliberately misuse words, as did Mark Antony. In his speech over Caesar's body he slyly converted "virtue" words into "poison" words designed to turn public feeling against Brutus, the "honourable" man. Conflict along this line is seen in the diversity of meanings given to widely-used words: democracy, despotism, freedom, pacificism, justice. Even "education" has different meanings in different countries.

### *Presenting a case*

Expression of one's convictions must not be left to look coldly intellectual. No appeal to reason that is not also an appeal to a want will succeed.

Too many people who could influence a trend toward improvement in home, business, community, and government, cling to a basic fallacy: they assume that if the facts are supplied then people will want what the facts indicate they should want.

We must become aware of the thinking that goes on inside other people — people who are living on islands of their own interests. We need to build a bridge with such things included as common sense, reason, fair play, love, dreams of a better self and a better world: and then add interest, feeling, sentiment. It would take a thick government White Paper to say in official language what President Roosevelt said so effectively in a dozen words: "I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished."

Instead of reading aloud the minutes of a meeting supporting an enterprise, we should try to hammer out some phrases that will convey the spirit of the cause to the people who listen or read so as to bring them into communion with us. Use familiar symbols, tell parables, bridge the gap between what the situation is now and what it can become following the proposed action. This is what Isaiah did in his prophecies; this is what Paul did in his Epistles; this is what Churchill did in his war-time speeches; this is what Roosevelt did in his Fireside Chats; this is what Governor General Vanier did in his addresses promoting the welfare of the family.

Show that what is proposed is in the hearer's enlightened self-interest. In his own life story, every man and woman is potentially the hero or the heroine. It is not sufficient to paint a picture of what people are: it is not even enough to paint a picture of what they know they want to be: paint, rather, a picture of what they would like to think of themselves as becoming. You have succeeded if your message strikes your audience as a wording of their own highest thoughts now brought to remembrance by your words.

Hope for the best. As Matthew Arnold reminded us in *Culture and Anarchy*, Socrates has drunk his hem-

lock and is dead; but in his own breast every man carries about with him a possible Socrates — the power of a disinterested play of consciousness upon notions.

You do not need to have an outstandingly high intelligence quotient. Harriet Beecher Stowe was not a literary sophisticate, but she painted word pictures of slavery that were unforgettable, pictures which played a big part in freeing the slaves. That could not have been accomplished by the staid, solid, exactly truthful articles in the abolitionist journals.

Look at how cleverly the *Communist Manifesto* was put together by Karl Marx. It has all the allure of a fairy tale. Once upon a time, he says, there were patricians, knights, plebeians and slaves. Then there was a feudal society consisting of lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices and serfs. Then rose the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Marx loads his story with dramatic struggle. He gives his reader something to fight for. And he puts a happy ending to his tale: the classless society with everyone sharing in property.

### *Have you something to say?*

Everyone knows the let-down he finds in a book that was written because the author desired the prestige of being a writer rather than because he had something to say. Before you start to write or talk you need to have something to say.

Are you the one to say it? It may be more effective to communicate indirectly or to have someone else present your message. Recall how the audience listened more actively to Charley McCarthy than to Edgar Bergen.

Is the environment right? Do conditions permit the success of the course you are sponsoring, conditions of living, of the market, of government, of the world?

What about opposition? There are obstructionists, people who find a difficulty for every solution you proffer. There are many more people who are not interested. Your tactics with both sorts might be this: Tell why your plan is necessary or desirable and what it may be expected to accomplish; how it can be worked out; who will be affected by it; what your audience should do to help along the good work.

You have immersed yourself in the facts, you have chosen those which are pertinent; you have thrown them into understandable form and clothed them in bright language: now is the time to display your zeal, your enthusiasm, and your earnest sincerity.

Silence and delay accomplish nothing for even the greatest believers in good. Emile Zola mentioned in his letter to the President of France in the Dreyfus case, called *J'Accuse*: "Two of the victims, two brave, open-hearted men who waited for God to act while the devil was frightfully busy."

Canada is in the making, and all Canadians can participate. Everything remains to be done, or done over. The greatest Canadian contribution to world society has not yet been made, or the perfect community organized, or the best government elected, or the most rational code of law enacted. All of these are things we work toward, and the way to reach them is by communication.