



THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA

MONTHLY LETTER

HEAD OFFICE, MONTREAL, SEPTEMBER 1950

OUR CANADIAN WAY OF LIFE

THIS article is an attempt to condense into a mere 3,000 words the essence of what goes to make up our Canadian Way of Life; it would take volumes and volumes to tell it all.

What we can see in a quick summary is good. In a world where we are harried day and night by new devices and disturbances, Canadians live comfortably, though not so easily as to stagnate. Our national ambition is to live richly, rather than to be rich.

If we have a fault, it is to take for granted the values and benefits of our Canadian way of life. This free society, eminent in the world because of its individual freedoms and its great opportunities for self-advancement and the sense of security it provides to ease men's minds, was gained by the struggles and sacrifices of the men and women from whom we inherit it.

One hundred and twelve years ago — a short span in human history — Governor-General Lord Durham reported to the British Government: "These small and unimportant communities (Upper and Lower Canada, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland) could be elevated into a society having some objects of national importance." It is hard to realize today how bold and optimistic that judgment was in its time.

Today, Canada is a leader in civilization. She may not dominate the physical world by her size, her economic strength, her armed might or her population figures, but in the world of ideas, of humanity and of graceful living she is second to no country on earth.

The strength of Canada's mind and the high level of her ideals are shown in unique ways. She is the only kingdom on a huge continent of republics, yet her people enjoy a measure of freedom unsurpassed — and probably not equalled — in the Americas. She has originated and developed autonomy within a world system of commonwealths, yet keeps the most intimate friendship with the world's greatest independent state. Her internal dualism, linking two widely different

cultures in a united nation, seems to qualify her in a special way for participation in the councils of the nations.

What Kind of People Are We?

What kind of people are Canadians? The outstanding fact is that we are all kinds of people. The French speaking Canadians have more American generations behind them than any other white stock north of the Rio Grande, save only the Spanish. Their energy and volatility and family spirit were necessary to the upbuilding of this raw land. Then came the Scotch, the English, the Irish and the Welsh, with their efficiency, thriftiness and their whole-souled respect for law, order and self-control. To these, in the hundred years of Canada's great growth, were added thousands from other lands, east, west and south. Today, they are all Canadians.

When the first settlers came to this land, the French and the British were already cultured peoples, with ancient roots in literature, fine art, music, and science. They had social structures of high quality, and had laid the foundations of noble civilizations.

Out of these cultures was forged the common denominator in Canadian character. Today, some of the differences have been merged harmoniously; while some have survived in a way that prevents standardization of the nation. It is a grand feat in nation building when two diverse cultures march cordially together, co-operating and making allowances, merging ideas and preserving ideals, and welcoming people from many other nations.

So here we are: a complex aggregation of people in a land of striking contrasts, facing together problems of wide diversity. The marvel of it is that we have woven the culture and institutions of all these people into an orderly and attractive pattern.

We have learned that there are not only two sides but many views of every case. We know that the greatest nation is not a nationalistic nation but one that has

many ties, of blood and mind and ideals, with other nations.

Some people might say that we do not show in our daily living that we are conscious of our keen sense of participation in an epoch-making experiment in nation building, or of our deep awareness of the greatness of the adventure upon which Canada has embarked. We are, in fact, less colourful figures to the world than our own tourist advertisements make us out to be. We have, as Hugh MacLennan put it, such a talent for avoiding the dramatic that we often escape even the notice of our friends. We have a habit of appearing solemn when we are only serious.

From Struggle to Comfort

Well, we are conservative by necessity and habit. We have not had an easy country in which to work or live. The Arctic wilderness presses close upon our cities. Montreal, our great metropolis — an island of 1,442,000 people; the world's greatest inland port, a thousand miles from the sea; a city with the world's greatest French-speaking population, aside from Paris — lies only 45 miles by rail from the United States border. One hundred and twenty miles west is Ottawa, the capital city of Canada. And beyond Ottawa the hills and tundra stretch, scarcely touched by human hands, unbroken to the Arctic Sea.

To survive in this narrow strip between the world's most highly-developed industrial nation and the barren land, we have had to be a tough and adaptable people. We have little margin for error.

Yet this country is in the centre of world affairs. Our doors open east and west, north and south, where unpredictable changes are taking place in great nations. We are, literally, at the crossroads of a newly-developing world.

Upon this narrow strip of land we have built a nation in which it is good to live. It is false to idealize the past, because the ease and comfort of today were not born of easiness and lassitude. It was a tough job, to make Canada what she is today. To raise the standard of living on this continent to levels never elsewhere attained demanded work and planning of a high order.

Once our people hewed farm plots out of the wilderness, built their own homes, made their own clothes and produced their own food. Children and women laboured hard in the fields and there was no diversion but sleep.

This year, Toronto is building a subway to carry thousands of persons swiftly and comfortably between their homes and downtown. Machines are digging a trench along Yonge Street. Here is menial work, but no manual toil and no slavery; only proud mechanics guiding the great machines. There, but for invention and initiative, go a thousand slaves, poor skill-less men, digging wearily with tools a thousand years old.

There are wires on our roofs, on which birds sit to sing, but within the wires are songs from half a world away, brought by the genius that developed radio.

In hydro power we are pre-eminent among nations. Waterfalls are harnessed to bring us electricity, pouring into our factories power in a cascade that liberates a hundred men with every pulsation.

At the last count, a million homes out of 3,300,000 had refrigerators, 3,127,000 had radios, 623,000 had electric ranges, and 2 million had electric washing machines. When we take a total view, and see our modern Canada against its background, we are comforted. Some may still live backward lives, but millions are living better, and all have the opportunity to step forward.

The Test of Democracy

As part of our improved standard of living we must recognize the increased attention given to social services. Public health is the concern of all levels of government. Pensions for the aged and the blind have been adopted by the provinces with financial help from the Dominion. Unemployment insurance, family allowances, war pensions, help in home-building, and many other forms of assistance, are provided through government action.

But these are merely incidental; they are not the measure of a democracy. The test of democracy is the extent of freedom its people have from dependence on authority. This freedom is a sign of maturity.

It can be said with assurance that Canadians do not wish to become so dependent on their government that they, like people in some other countries, will forfeit political democracy. All that they look for is adequate reward for initiative, ability and work, with safeguards for those who cannot work.

Hon. Paul Martin, Minister of National Health and Welfare, told a conference on social work in June: "It never can be too often emphasized that social security is not an end in itself; it is only part of the pattern of our whole social system. The first essential in any society is to produce in such quantities that all who are willing to work and who can work will be able to enjoy a decent livelihood for themselves and their families."

Closely allied with dependency is fear. People who live in states where citizens are kept as dependents are afraid that their benefits will be cut off if they offend the powers that handle the distribution of gifts, allowances and bonuses.

Freedom

Canadians, whether native-born or immigrants, may live and act with full security within our pattern of freedom. We do not simply safeguard human rights; we erect an order of law, animated by freedom of men's spirits.

This means that men must not expect that in Canada they will be told what to do. That is the kind of thing that happened in Germany and Russia. We believe

here that freedom to think should be followed by using your head to choose between alternative courses of action. It is freedom of choice that develops personality, and it is only out of personality expression that reasonable men derive satisfaction.

Democratic governments feel it to be part of their duty to avoid unnecessary interference with men and women who intend to carve out careers on their own. They believe it is their duty to interfere as little as possible with voluntary associations. They leave men free to make an honest livelihood at what trades they want, and do not dragoon them into labour. They encourage men to express their opinions.

Canadians believe in independence and in the growth of personal responsibility. They reject the suggestion that men should be made good citizens by compulsion, by statute, or by coercion. They believe more good will be accomplished by inducting the Golden Rule into all phases of Canadian life than by any number of government edicts. Regard for one's fellow man, considered by some to be the touchstone of all other virtues, stands out as a cardinal principle of Canadian life, both within Canada and in her international contacts.

The Good Citizen

All of these rights, liberties and benefits are at the free and bountiful service of good citizens. Anyone can be a good citizen of Canada if he keeps his heart right; if he acknowledges the dignity and worth of all socially acceptable work; if he appreciates the necessity and justice of a fair return for a fair day's labour; if he realizes the interdependence of all people, and that a high standard of living depends upon the co-operation and contribution of all people; if he feels the need for conserving Canada's natural resources of men and materials, and does his part toward their best development; if he participates in municipal, provincial and federal government and in community affairs.

That citizens should participate in governing themselves is a vital part of democracy. You cannot set up a democracy by building government machinery, but only by developing a spirit.

When a person is convinced that our Canadian way of life offers more opportunity and happiness to larger numbers of persons than does any other scheme, he will be eager to contribute his share to keeping it effectively working. The democracy of which we are talking is an arrangement of life whereby the members of a group, large or small, have opportunity to partake in proportion to their maturity and ability. There is no room in such a society for envious dislike of persons who are prominent or great, but an appreciation of what all greatness adds to the common good.

Our Government

Democratic government is a form of government in which the people rule by discussion and compromise. Free elections, in which the people choose their

government representatives, and the secret ballot, which gives them absolute freedom of choice, are prized possessions of Canadians.

In Canada, *all* government is elected government, responsible to the people. The cabinet, which has its finger on all phases of national life, economic and social, internal and external, is made up of men chosen from the elected representatives of the people. These men, each of whom is head of a department of government, are directly responsible to parliament.

There is no distinction between class or creed in Canadian public affairs. Rich or poor, a Canadian citizen has a voice in the government, may serve on a municipal council, in a provincial legislature, in parliament, or on boards set up by any of these governments. Minorities are heard freely and patiently.

The existence of an opposition party in parliament is necessary to our system. In totalitarian countries there can be only one political party, and a revolution is needed if a government is to be changed. In a democracy, the people may vote the government out and the opposition in.

This is one reason why it is the duty of any democratic government to take the people frankly into its confidence.

Consultation is one of the oldest democratic functions, the natural instrument for government to use in order to harmonize its policy with public opinion. The people should be given a picture in broad outline of the proposed plan and of the economic and social facts that underlie it. Then they should be shown what are their individual tasks and duties. The people of a democratic country like Canada cannot be driven in blinkers. Any attempt to promote great changes without making clear the purpose and method will dissolve into frustration.

External Affairs

Canadians have a compelling interest in world affairs. The pressure of events, the continuing sense of crisis, and the rivalries of continents, demand clear and confident rather than flamboyant leadership, and this Canada is prepared to give. She has the attributes of a hunter who was referred to by a companion in these terms: "He is the kind of man to go tiger hunting with in the dark, because you can always reach out and be sure he is there."

Canada, more than most nations, needs world peace for her prosperity. Her external trade provides a third of her national income. If her exports were cut off or seriously interfered with, every workman's pay envelope would suffer. For this practical reason, as well as because of a natural desire for world peace and order, Canada supports the United Nations.

Religion and Education

People in Canada worship in many different ways, yet their belief in God, their emphasis upon trust, hope and love are strong assets toward the development of

good citizenship. All the faiths represented in Canada, and freely practised here, teach the dignity of the human soul, and regard all individuals as important members of the human family. The church, of whatever denomination, is the voice of the nation's conscience.

This spiritual culture, the inward force which creates and sustains the outward manifestations of civilization, is the greatest power a democracy can have. That is one reason why democracies take such pains to safeguard the right of citizens to worship "each according to the dictates of his own conscience". It is one of the most important freedoms in the modern world.

Church authorities in Canada and elsewhere are emphatic in their condemnation of the atheism and tyranny of Communism. Any system of government that deprives people of the right to faith, the exercise of their religious instincts, and the communion of spirit provided by worship, will be condemned by all right-thinking people.

There are ample and freely-available educational resources in Canada, directed to providing the opportunity for self-realization, human relationship, economic efficiency and civic responsibility.

The standard educational ladder consists of eight grades in a public elementary school and four or five in a public secondary school, though there are minor differences in the provinces. The vital point is that throughout these years education is free. There are certain "separate" schools to accommodate minority groups.

After school years comes adult education, which enables the mature members of the community to pursue various courses of study. In recent years, adult education has grown from almost complete obscurity to the position of a third partner along with higher education and the public schools. It is not a scheme to help the illiterate and under-educated to "catch up", but a plan for enabling everyone to develop the best that is in him and obtain the greatest satisfactions out of life.

Adult education is a main strength of democracy. Subversive influences and totalitarian philosophies thrive on ignorance. They cannot stand the light of truth. This is why enlightened men in business, government and education are supporting every advance in adult education, urging the idea of lighting up the schools at night for use of mature persons, and contributing through pamphlets, films and posters to the spread of knowledge.

Law and the Police

The high standing and independence of magistrates and judges have always been conspicuous merits in Canadian government. Judges are not elected but are appointed for life by the Governor-General in Council or the Provincial Lieutenant-Governor in

Council, according to the rank and duty of the court. They must not take part in politics, and are not allowed to vote. Their positions are regarded by all as posts of great honour and responsibility.

Respect for the law derives from the highest levels. In taking the Coronation Oath, the King is asked: "Will you to your power, cause Law and Justice, in Mercy, to be executed in all your judgments?" To which the King assents, "I will."

From coast to coast, Canada has a uniform code of criminal laws and a uniform procedure in criminal matters. The purpose of law is to guard the liberties of every citizen. In a democracy like Canada, a man is free to live as he chooses so long as he keeps within the law which he, as a voter, had a hand in shaping.

The police in Canada, perhaps better than any other group, know the meaning of civil liberties and personal rights because it is their duty to guard against the violation of these rights by anyone or by any group. They are the friends of every good citizen, and the defenders of our free democratic way of life.

Our Future

We can listen at any moment and hear our country growing. The air is rich with promise. The spirit of Canada is progressive still. We can say to the children who left school this year what old Voltaire, when he went to Paris in 1778 to die, said to the youth in whose hearts he sensed the grandeur of the coming century: "The young are fortunate: they will see great things."

We are not seeking a mechanical utopia, or a country with highways paved with gold. The ideal Canada will be developed by its people, using all that science can give them as an aid but keeping their roots firmly grounded in the rich heritage of the past.

To quote a fine Greek adage: "Life is the gift of nature, but beautiful living is the gift of wisdom." What we need in these days is to broaden our knowledge and intelligence, and at the same time cling to the simple virtues which our society approves. The values which test achievement — honesty, truthfulness, self-control, fair play, loyalty, devoutness, and many others — these play a determining part in the course and pattern of life.

We, a nation of 14 million people, cover no other man's land. We wish that the nations of the world should live together in peace, and that we and they should develop an exalted spirit of co-operation.

We will do our share toward bringing into being the better world of which all good men dream. We will transmit our handiwork to future Canadians, in the confident faith that time will merely wear away the dross of it, and that what is worthy in what we and our children build will be preserved.