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What Use is the Census?

EVERY PERSON residing in Canada who was born before midnight on Monday, May 31, 1971, will be counted in the Census on Tuesday, June 1st. This roll-call is in effect a stop-action snapshot of Canadians at a moment in time.

The British North America Act of 1867, under which the provinces became a nation, provided for a census in 1871 and every tenth year thereafter.

Only 41 words were used to enact this law: "In the General Census of the population of Canada, which is hereby required to be taken in the year one thousand, eight hundred and seventy-one and in every tenth year thereafter, the respective populations of the four provinces shall be distinguished."

This sentence recognized the autonomy of the provinces then existing, by providing that each one should have its people enumerated as citizens of that province.

After a hundred years the need for information about ourselves is greater than ever. Society is becoming ever more complex. Governments at all levels — federal, provincial, and municipal — need more, and more varied, information in greater detail upon which to base their planning. Business firms, school authorities, welfare associations, churches, city planners, economists, and scores of others, require data to help them to make wise decisions.

How else than by a count of people by marital status and age could any public body estimate the costs of social security measures such as family allowances and old age pensions? How else than by a survey of housing conditions could a municipality appraise the need for construction of houses? How else than by a tabulation of the levels of living across the country could a government judge the need and effect of legislation dealing with economic and social matters?

Some people will say: "But governments on all levels are constantly keeping tab on us, and the Dominion Bureau of Statistics issues reports on one or another feature of business and life every week. Why do they need this wholesale effort?"

The fact that distinguishes a census from partial surveys is that it presents a picture of all our people and all our country at a specific point in time. This provides a firm base for computations, a sort of bench-mark, like those left on a line of survey by surveyors for reference at some future time.

Estimates of population made between censuses are faulty in that, while they provide a simple paper computation of the number of people living in Canada, they give no information about whether those people are better off, worse off, or about the same as they were ten years previously. Executives in business firms do not rely upon the addition of sums in their books, but take inventory of their stock on hand at regular intervals.

Translated into national terms, this census stock-taking is a big operation. It requires about 50,000 workers, specially-made electronic equipment to process millions of questionnaires, and computers to organize and compile and store the information. The cost will be more than \$35 million.

Canada is world leader

The modern census originated in Canada, and this country is still regarded abroad as a world leader in many aspects of census-taking.

It was in 1666 that Jean Talon, the Intendant of New France, took an official census of the colony to measure the increase in population that had taken place since the founding of Quebec by Champlain in 1608. Talon's enumeration, recording a total of 3,215 persons, included the name, age, sex, marital status and occupation of every person.

The record says that the great Intendant himself carried out a considerable part of the roll-call, "visiting from door to door all the habitations of Mont Réal, Trois Rivières, Cap-de-la-Madeleine, and all places above Québec."

The original document of 154 pages is in the Archives of Paris, but anyone interested in this unique event may see a transcript in the Canadian Public Archives at Ottawa.

When the 1871 census had been compiled, Dr. J. C. Taché, our first census commissioner, conceived the idea of bringing together a tabulation of all preceding censuses in what is now Canada, covering a period of more than 200 years. Thus Canada became the only country in the world to have detailed statistical records of its growth from its earliest days.

It is nothing new to require people to stand up and be counted. The census goes back 5000 years in Babylonia and China, and three or four thousand years in Egypt and among the Children of Israel. In olden times the purpose was to list the number of fighting men in a country, or to levy taxes: today's objective is to provide information upon which to plan constructively for every citizen's welfare.

The necessity for this information is evidenced, for example, by the sudden and unexpected spurt in population that has occurred since the end of World War II. As recently as 1941 the population of Canada was only 11,506,000. According to the best of current estimates, based on known births, deaths, and migration, our population passed the 21 million mark in March 1969. A publication of the Bureau of Statistics remarks: "The 1971 census should show a population of almost 22 million — a gain of nearly 100 per cent in thirty years."

Information is confidential

There is much talk these days about "invasion of privacy" by governments, but the census is not of that nature. It represents the confidential sharing of personal information for the public good.

In marking the census sheet it should be kept in mind that no single answer to any question is of any interest to the men and women compiling census returns. It is only when a number of answers have been brought together and turned into averages or percentages that the figures become meaningful. The identity of the respondents is of no consequence.

No other government department or agency, no law court, and no police force, is ever allowed to have census information concerning individuals. The information is kept on microfilm in the Bureau of Statistics vaults under strict security.

The Dominion Statistician, Walter E. Duffett, makes this clear beyond doubt in a letter that accompanies census questionnaires: "The Census of Canada is taken under the authority of the Statistics Act, which requires everyone to provide the information required. The same Act guarantees that information you provide about yourself in the census questionnaire will be kept secret and used only to produce statistics. It will ensure that no one will know what answers you gave except for DBS employees, and they are subject to legal penalties if they disclose personal census information to anyone else."

The Bureau of Statistics is forbidden to release or publish any data that would directly or indirectly reveal information about a particular person or con-

cern. Thus, no information provided on a census return can ever be used to tax a person or to call him for military service.

When the questionnaires are processed, the optical scanning machine "reads" only the filled-in circles and feeds this information into the computer. The printed-in information cannot be transferred. Hence it is impossible to identify any individual in the census data stored by the computer's memory bank. The original questionnaires are shredded and burned.

There is only one exception to this secrecy. Where he has good reason, a Canadian resident may ask for date of birth information he has provided about himself in a past census.

Do-it-yourself plan

There is something different about the 1971 census. For the first time, the census man or woman will not enter every house and apartment to ask the questions and note the answers. Instead, after identifying the household, he or she will simply leave a questionnaire and an instruction booklet.

This means that the family head can study the questionnaire at a favourable time, look up records when necessary, and check with other members of the family before setting down the answers. If help is needed, it may be obtained by telephone at a number listed on the form.

This development is the result of many years of seeking a more efficient way of collecting information. Traditional door-to-door canvassing would involve calling on some six million households, and staying at every one long enough to record the answers to all the questions.

Consider, too, the fact that in these days both husband and wife of thousands of households are absent from home during the day because of the large increase in the number of working women. The number of "call-backs" would be beyond reasonable handling, and would prolong the census-taking.

The self-census has other advantages. It eliminates chances of error, because the householder has time to look up doubtful points. It avoids any embarrassment some people might feel when answering personal questions, such as those relating to age, income and employment.

Much work has been done to make the 1971 questionnaires as easy as possible to answer. Apart from names, addresses and telephone numbers, most questions are answered by using a special pencil, supplied with the form, to "black in" a circle.

Every family in specified urban areas will be asked to mail back its questionnaire in an addressed, postage-paid envelope. Outside the specified urban areas, census representatives will call at every home to collect questionnaires already filled out and to obtain answers to questions left blank. Only in remote outlying areas, or where special problems exist, will the traditional door-to-door canvass be made.

All citizens will appreciate the fact that the accuracy and completeness of every individual return determines the accuracy of the census itself. Complete information cannot be obtained unless every household answers all pertinent questions.

That is why the law requires everyone to provide the full information requested. The penalty for refusal to answer questions may be a fine of up to \$100 or imprisonment up to 30 days, or both. Similar penalties are provided for those wilfully giving false information on a census return.

These penalty clauses have been on the statute books for 53 years, but have rarely been invoked. Citizens have recognized that they are participating in a national effort directed toward Canada's welfare.

Everyone is involved

The census officials have a big job in trying to ensure that everyone has been counted. It does not matter where a person lives, they are charged with finding him for the record. There is no exception for any regular Canadian resident, whether he be in a hospital, travelling on a jet airplane or a train or a boat, fishing off the East or West Coasts, in a penitentiary, or away from home attending school.

Surprisingly, says the Bureau of Statistics, some of those who are hardest to count live in the centre of the biggest cities. They are people with no permanent address and transients who will be one place today and another tomorrow. The census officials try to account for them all by visiting rooming houses and hotels.

The mobility of the Canadian people is noteworthy. Interprovincial migration between 1961 and 1966 boosted British Columbia's population by 100,000 people, Ontario's by 57,000, and Quebec's by 4,000, while all the other provinces had a net migration loss. Estimates for the last three years of the decade indicate that migration continues unabated, but that the pattern is changing. British Columbia and Ontario appear to have gained another 100,000 and 30,000 respectively; Alberta, which lost 14,000 between 1961 and 1966, gained 7,000, and Quebec lost 38,000.

The questions

The same set of questions will be used throughout the country. Two families in three will receive a "short form", with only a few questions to be answered. Every third household will be asked additional questions about each person and the housing unit.

The short form gives a full picture of the Canadian population as to sex, age, marital status, language, relationship to the head of the household, and of basic housing conditions.

The longer form, issued to one in every three households as part of a scientific sampling technique, has additional questions relating to housing, education, jobs, migration, and incomes. By applying mathematical calculations to the answers obtained from this sample of the population, the Bureau of

Statistics will be able to develop a precise picture of all Canadians, including their social and economic circumstances.

Deciding what questions to ask is a big job. There is a limit to the number people will stand for, and every additional question carries with it a price tag in terms of the extra time required to answer it and process the answers.

No question is inserted merely because the information would be interesting, but only because it has a bearing on social or economic conditions. Representations as to questions are made by federal and provincial government agencies, business organizations, universities, town planning experts, financial institutions, and others. The final selection, which must be submitted to the Cabinet for approval, is made on the basis of the usefulness of the question, the cost involved in asking it, the relative difficulty of getting reliable answers, and the amount of effort it will take for the householder to provide the information.

In recent test censuses, some people objected to the questions concerning electrical appliances in the home. Since possession of a dish-washer, clothes drier, washing machine, electric refrigerator, and television set (whether black-and-white or colour) is at least an indication of living standards, the information is useful. In addition, it is important to municipal public utility commissions and provincial hydro authorities, because all these appliances use electric power and those who supply power need to know developing trends if they are to be prepared to meet peak loads in the years ahead.

Other censuses

In addition to the population and housing questionnaire, farm families will have a second important document to complete. It is the Census of Agriculture, taken every five years to provide current, detailed information about Canada's number one primary industry.

The national farm census shows governments and agricultural agencies whether present policies are effective, and it directs attention to areas where special problems may require special measures.

Filling out the form is a big and important job for the farmer. Canadian agriculture has been undergoing rapid change during the past twenty years, and farm problems are more urgent and complex than ever before. Farm associations, co-operatives, marketing boards, businesses serving the farmer, and local communities — all these need up-to-the-minute statistics to do their job on the farmer's behalf.

Later in the year there will be a census of wholesale, retail, and service establishments. This survey will show the changes which have taken place in the marketing structure and the channels of distribution. It helps manufacturers and wholesalers to determine consumer demand and to assess potential markets for specified commodities or groups of commodities.

When these facts, readily available in business records, have been assembled, there will be much information available about the number of business outlets, sales, inventory, employment, salaries and wages. Some questions about trends will be answered: Is the corner store holding its own against the chains? Do department stores account for a greater share of the market for various commodities than do specialty stores? In what lines of goods are the markets increasing, decreasing, or disappearing?

Wide range of uses

One of the main reasons for the institution of the census was to provide the information on which to determine the boundaries of electoral constituencies and apportion seats in Parliament and the Legislatures. Federal grants to provinces, and provincial grants to municipalities for many purposes are generally based on the population as reported by the Census of Canada.

The census tells us, by economic regions, provinces, territories, counties, cities, neighbourhoods and rural areas, where the needs are greatest. It enables us to see what progress we are making toward meeting our national goals in employment, housing, income and education.

The Economic Council of Canada used census statistics and other data arising out of census findings as a basis for its recommendations to governments at all levels concerning the framing of policies for an effective war on poverty. The Department of Regional Economic Expansion has pinpointed the areas in Canada needing special development help through analysis of census information, broken down on a regional basis.

Many problems have arisen through the movement of thousands of families from rural areas to cities and from the cities to the suburbs. Local governments need authentic information about these movements on which to base plans for schools, streets, sewers, fire and police protection.

The census gives business people a better opportunity to increase the efficiency with which they plan, sell, market and advertise. The manufacturer and the distributor must know, if they are to project the future of their businesses sensibly, how many people there will be as potential customers. This does not mean as to numbers only. What kind of people will they be as to sex and age? Where will they be living? Is the community growing, static or declining?

By consulting the census figures, bankers are supplied with a variety of information they need for sound appraisal of business development and of investment conditions and opportunities. Boards of trade, chambers of commerce, and other service institutions of the kind are enabled to advise and assist municipal authorities in community planning, locating new schools, erecting electric sub-stations, and so on.

One of the vital matters affecting both individuals and the economic prospects of the nation is the labour force status of individuals. How many are working? How many are seeking work? How many are outside the labour force because of keeping house, going to school, being ill or retired? These figures are of special interest to labour unions.

The general level of education is rising steadily. In 1941, only about one person in fifteen aged five to twenty-four had more than four years of high school. By 1961 the proportion had risen to one in eight. Specific up-to-date information is necessary to enable governments and educationists to plan efficiently for the next ten years.

Education is linked to income. Average incomes of non-farm families in 1961 were, arranged by the education of the male head of the family: no schooling, \$2,798; elementary, \$4,471; secondary, \$5,942; university degree, \$10,994. For census purposes, an accurate report on incomes from the lowest end of the scale to the highest is essential for a proper delineation of Canada as it is on census day.

The need to know the ages of people so as to calculate the future population possibilities is one good reason for including this question in the census, but there are others.

Without age data it would be impossible to estimate the cost of old age pensions or family allowances, and the government would have to move blindly in making up its budget. Insurance companies need these figures in calculating the mortality rates, and social workers need them to deal with problems of dependency represented by persons in the very young and very old age groups. Educational authorities in provinces and municipalities must know the population by age groups if they are to provide adequate school accommodation. In fact, there are so many urgent needs for information about the ages of our people that this is one of the most important of the census questions.

A co-operative effort

These are just some of the reasons for having the census, and they are reasons which appeal to every citizen's feeling that he should co-operate actively in making the operation a success.

Without periodical appraisal of our condition and affairs, parliament, provincial legislatures, municipalities, business people, and educationists would all work in the dark. No one would know whether the country was on the highway to success or the slippery road to disaster. We could not tell whether our national standard of living was rising or falling, or what our possibilities were for improvement in peace or for defence in war. There would be no clear picture of our national health needs, our national educational level, or of a host of other features by which we are able to judge Canada's progress and to plan for the future.