



# THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA MONTHLY LETTER

VOL. 55, No. 6

HEAD OFFICE: MONTREAL, JUNE 1974

## *A Canadian Renaissance*

BORN: JULY 1ST, 1867, CANADA: daughter of Great Britain and France.

In Ottawa, the announcement was greeted by the firing of a 101-gun salute while all the church bells pealed; High Mass was sung in the cathedral at Trois-Rivières; in Saint John, 21 guns were fired as a salute in honour of the event. Most Canadians walked that day under banners inscribed: "Success to the Confederacy" or "Bienvenue à la nouvelle puissance".

There is something delectable about feeling grown-up, and at 107 years of age that is the spirit in which Canada celebrates her birthday as a nation.

The pendulum has swung from the isolation and privation of pioneer days through revolutionary changes in our environment until today our level of living is among the highest in the world. In fact, there is worry expressed about our over-nourishment and our physical inactivity. Seldom before, if ever, have young people been so well fed, so well-read, and so bright-minded when starting to live their own lives.

Canada's experience up to now has not been drab. It was exciting in its happening and diversified enough to suit the most exacting story-teller. All her history is woven into the fabric of the dress she wears today.

Many nations were represented among the pioneers from European countries who intruded upon the virgin geography of this continent, and today Canada speaks in many tongues, goes to many churches, and opens her doors to people of many lands.

The swaddling clothes period of Canada's growth was not an easy one. Besides the hardships of climate and loneliness and making a living there were hostile clans, belligerent neighbours, and the uncertainty of life under rulers who were three thousand miles away across an ocean traversed slowly by sailing vessels: rulers who knew little about conditions in their colonies.

By 1867 it had become evident to the people who made up the family that something had to be done, and they turned toward union. Chief among their political purposes was to establish a new nation to meet the changed conditions of British policy and to unite the scattered provinces and colonies against

possible aggression from the south. Economically, the purpose was to spread dependence over many industries instead of only a few, and thus lessen exposure to the effects of the economic policies then being pursued by both Great Britain and the United States. Through mutual concession it was hoped to preserve cultural and local loyalties and reconcile them with political strength and solidarity.

Making one political body out of two is among the most difficult of human tasks. It took centuries to unite England and Scotland; more centuries to form Italy or Germany. On this North American continent two political miracles have occurred: thirteen States peacefully united to form the United States of America, and three provinces with people of two cultures equally peacefully formed the Dominion of Canada.

The people of Canada are not a faceless legion. Aristotle defined man as a rational animal; on another occasion he described man as a political animal. Thus the philosopher pointed up two important aspects of human nature: the individuality and the sociality of man.

Canada has succeeded well in keeping in balance the claims that derive from these two aspects. It has developed co-operation for the public good while retaining the principle of personhood. It seeks to give every person the chance to sense his relevance in the nation, and the opportunity to live significantly.

### *Freedom and equality*

Freedom is a widely-held desire of humanity. We see evidence of this expressed everywhere through bills of rights and acts of parliament laying down basic rights in freedom of expression, religion, thought, the press, and assembly. People are really free when the conditions that surround them permit them to make use of their capabilities as individuals — materially, intellectually and spiritually.

It is necessary for governments and people to keep the balance between order and liberty.

Personal freedom needs to be limited by the well-established principle of democracy: the greatest good

of the greatest number. Political freedom consists in being able to choose between two or more courses of action. Canada has no political shackles on freedom of opinion or the freedom to express ideas.

Liberty and equality are at times uneasy bed-fellows. The demand for equality must take account of the fact that even in a democracy there are many things that are unequal.

One of the most difficult problems of government is the equal treatment of unequals. All men, and all women, are not created identical in physical qualities or mental qualities, but the democratic state tries to give them equal opportunity and equal hope. In this effort the ancient feeling of brotherhood is far and away superior to the current demand for equality. It carries obligations unknown to equality. It calls for respect and protection.

There is a sort of "equality" in which no man is better than his neighbour, in which superiority is denied, excellence is derided, and leadership is suspect. This distorted idea of equality springs from the thought that by honouring another person's worth a person is lowering his own. Actually, when we commend good thoughts or actions we are making them in some measure our own.

Canada offers as freely as any other country, a sane, balanced way of life in which men and women can develop their individual gifts.

Equal opportunity, however, will not mean anything except to people of ability who have a will to action, length of view and the necessary knowledge. A person who declares a desire to write, but wants to start "creative" writing without an apprenticeship; a person who starts to study to improve his working position and quits in favour of other attractions: these cannot complain legitimately that they are deprived of opportunity.

### *A nation of character*

Socrates warned his hearers that the attempt to sketch an ideal state was undertaken only for experimental purposes, and that perhaps the most that can be hoped for is that existing states may come near in quality to this ideal. Canada is attempting, not to build a visionary Utopia, but to give itself character as a nation.

Character is not something inherited. It is won by hard work, integrity, unity of purpose, faith, great-mindedness, moderation, unselfishness, intelligence, benevolence and self-reliance. These are all qualities that appear desirable in individuals and that are spoken well of by all the great religions. When they become universal in the people of a nation, that nation will have character.

An ideal is needed, a vision of the best of the best. What is ideal is the highest product of the imagination, picturing conditions which fulfil all the best thoughts and desires of the individual or the nation.

According to Reuben P. Halleck, author of *Psy-*

*chology and Psychic Culture*, an ideal might embody the energy of Napoleon, the integrity and patriotism of Washington, the iron will of Cromwell, the ambition of Newton or Franklin to discover new natural laws, the inventive genius of Watt, Morse or Edison, the sympathy with humanity of a Grenfell or Léger, the determination of blind Milton to leave behind something worthy of himself which posterity would not willingly let die.

Even though contemplating an ideal may not produce perfection, it produces improvement. Tolstoy declared: "It is untrue that an ideal of infinite perfection cannot be a guide in life; and that I must either throw it away or must lower it to the level at which it suits my weakness to rest."

### *Law and justice*

Children in a nation that is seeking to be great and good should not be brought up with an intimate knowledge of nuclear power and in complete ignorance of the ethical principles that are part of the nation's culture. The way of right dealing and justice should be taught as a matter of duty and followed as a matter of honour.

Honour is an old-fashioned word encompassing duty, responsibility, and respect for the eternal values. It is the spinal column of democracy, supporting the structure and carrying the motor nerves that convey action impulses to the muscles.

Laws are not enough, even if they are good laws well enforced. What we need is not so much the prohibition of murder — which most of us are not likely to commit — as some knowledge of the positive virtues and practice in them. Goodness is not, in a person or a nation, simply the absence of wrongdoing, but a love of whatsoever things are true, pure, honest, just, lovely, and of good report.

Solon, the great lawgiver of ancient Athens, remarked: The city is best modelled where those that are not injured prosecute and punish the unjust as zealously as do those that are injured.

Every agency of justice, from the Minister in Parliament to the policeman on his beat, ought to desire to be considered clement and not cruel. Nevertheless, he ought to take care not to misuse this clemency. Mercy and lenience are asked for guilty persons: justice is all that an innocent man requires. If society pardons the offender too much, it does wrong to the law-abiding citizen and it condones the doing of evil.

### *Obligations of democracy*

There is authority for the principle that the united support of common ideals by people who, though of various ancestry, have a common allegiance, may hold the best guarantee and promise of liberty and civilization. Individual points of view there must be, but Canada should reaffirm on her 107th birthday her determination that no thought of separate advantage, no claim of special privilege, shall outweigh the over-

riding common interest. The good of the whole is what matters.

One freedom not allowed to human beings is freedom from responsibility. There are duties that must be performed to preserve democratic freedom. People who desire a free and effective government must think of themselves as its custodians. In this duty they must not be indolent or careless.

Unselfish activities, spacious thoughts, and clear vision are not to be expected of people who normally put their personal comfort above the necessities of society. Some persons avoid responsibility in civic and social affairs because of fear of becoming "involved", or because of disinterest in anything that does not minister directly to their own pleasure. The reward for accepting civic responsibility is not necessarily money or power or a public statue. Self-respect and the respect of others are quite enough.

Many things that are right and desirable cannot be done by legislation or by institutions. They will never be done unless some individual is prepared to do them for no reward except the satisfaction of being of service.

People need inspiration to participate in this selfless service. Those who are self-absorbed have no vision of Canada's needs or the development of their latent potentialities. The phrase: "Why should I stick my neck out?" is the graceless symbol of leaners and freeloaders.

Human welfare, for which in a general way governments were created, has now become in a precise and specific way a main object of government everywhere. In the developing industrial societies many people are going to get hurt through no special fault of their own. These are the people whom it is a duty to help. But a welfare state, as Lord Beaverbrook pointed out, "must be founded on hard work, not on the belief that the government's duty is to act as a wet nurse to the sluggards and parasites who contribute as little as possible in return."

### *Conserving resources*

Canada's resources are of international significance. Maurice Strong, a Canadian who is executive director of the United Nations environment programme, warned in an address in Ottawa in February that Canada has a special responsibility in managing its resources and its environment.

We live in a planetary society, in the midst of nations which are passionately realistic. We have to think of our resource development not only from our own viewpoint but through the eyes of others.

Mr. Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt drew attention to this when they devised that paragraph of the Atlantic Charter which reads: "to further the enjoyment by all states, great or small, victor or vanquished, of access, on equal terms, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity."

### *Into the future*

As Canada celebrates her 107th birthday as a nation, bedecked with laurel leaves for achievement and rosemary for remembrance, she must have in mind that 1974 will take its place in the procession of the years. As on the day of birth everything lies in the future, so on a birthday anniversary the future is the vital thought.

Life will become drab and meaningless for the citizens if their government has not set up certain attainable goals beyond the day-to-day tasks. It must not become absorbed in dealing with the things of immediate political and economic moment and lose sight of the future that lies beyond a government's term of office. The rainbow's end is a good deal farther away than this year's balanced budget or next year's wheat crop.

In her plans for the future Canada should take an approach that is hopeful and positive. It is her obligation to leave the human culture a little better than it was in 1867. Very few people escape the desire to pass on something of themselves to their children and others. Canada's opportunity is great if she uses the instruments that have been put into her hands: to enlighten people, to develop leaders, to extend help to those who need it, and to spread the spirit of what is right throughout the world.

This is a time to get above the turmoil and the confines of one's own life to see how things stand, and to get a view of things that are distant toward which one should aim. It is time to bring our utopian hopes and our everyday world into contact.

We need the faith of the Fathers of Confederation. They had no other idea than that this child of their design would fit, perhaps not at once, but eventually, into the space in the universe that was waiting for her.

Canada is old enough now to turn from dwelling upon the catalogue of the good things with which she was endowed and start to develop her original thought. This is her task: to adjust to the problems of a modern industrial society within the framework of a rigid constitution where jurisdiction is divided. She needs a strong purpose to determine her course and a strong arm for building.

### *On having standards*

People who talk about principles and ideals are sometimes told to come down from that lofty sphere to the firm ground of practical work. "Face the urgent problems of material interests," we are told by materialists.

Most people sense that there are other important needs in life besides making a living. We shall live happier lives if we make a rendezvous with excellence in all the activities that go to make up human existence. The most poignant failure is not to be true to the best that one knows.

This may be one of the epochs in which man becomes conscious of something about himself which is

outside the day-to-day struggle for existence and the night-to-night struggle with fear, said Kenneth Clark in *Civilisation* (British Broadcasting Corporation, London, 1969). "He has felt the need to develop these qualities of thought and feeling: reason, justice, physical beauty, all of them in equilibrium."

Men and women and nations can become greater than they are by applying themselves to the production of work that has quality. It is disastrous when a nation or a person gives up thinking of excellence and settles for what is expedient. That is one of the dangers faced by an affluent society. Contentment leads to stagnation.

### *Civilization is fragile*

The coat of civilization, which is defined as cultural and intellectual refinement, is precariously thin.

Civilization is made up of all sorts of things, from world peace to being nice to people. Ruskin hoped that by means of art, religion and literature all people might become civilized, but there are still many people who think of civilization in "go-getter" terms: personal aggrandizement, inventiveness, national expansion.

Clark defines it differently. "I believe that order is better than chaos, creation better than destruction. I prefer gentleness to violence, forgiveness to vendetta. On the whole I think that knowledge is preferable to ignorance, and I am sure that human sympathy is more valuable than ideology. I believe in courtesy, the ritual by which we avoid hurting other people's feelings by satisfying our own ego."

Canadians will agree with this definition. It is the way they would like to live in Canada, and the way they would like Canada to live in the world.

How are Canadians to make the most of their opportunity to bring about this sort of life? They must start with themselves. They cannot succeed, or indeed get very far, unless they believe whole-heartedly in their objective. Then they need to reconstruct the small face-to-face community and revitalize neighbourhood living. There is a mistaken idea that a lot of money is all that is needed to spruce up a neighbourhood, but the truth is that personal service in time and effort is the only really effective agent, and it is the most rewarding. As to money, there is a town in Kentucky that raised the money with which it remodelled its town hall by cake sales and similar community projects.

Co-operation is a necessity of life. A strong man, living, striving, toiling for himself and by himself alone, is a miserable spectacle, divorced from humanity. A strong nation, living for itself by itself is a tragedy.

Individuals have today greater active participation in government, and the sole purpose of government is the public good. In a rational society, people in government have a higher aim than to address great audiences, to present themselves as public benefactors

or saviours, and to seek to become statesmen by waving the national flag.

Canada's leaders should be men and women who have cultivated their natural endowments to the highest degree. The person cut out for parliamentary service does not think small. Like Plato's philosopher-king, he adheres to the pattern of justice, beauty, and truth; he cultivates knowledge; he contemplates the future as well as the present. One great figure like that presents an example that a lot of other persons will follow.

### *Seek a renaissance*

This is a suitable occasion for Canada to consider the benefit of creating a new renaissance, a renewal of life and vigour, a rebirth.

The Renaissance Man is defined by the dictionary as: "a person of broad intellectual and cultural interests, encompassing the full spectrum of available knowledge."

Western civilization has been a series of rebirths, and there is no compelling reason why Canada cannot have a big part to play in generating one. Dr. Halbert L. Dunn asks the question in *Renaissance of Responsibility*: "Can a renaissance begin that will transform man and society? Nothing short of a renaissance is capable of bringing about such a miracle. A renaissance requires all types of leadership and a great variety of organizations."

Canada can, in her internal affairs, create a lively pattern that will move men and women to admire and attempt great things. Such a movement requires outstanding and vigorous leadership. Petrarch, the earliest of the humanists, whose life marks the dawn of the Renaissance in Italy, awakened the interest of his countrymen in the ancient Greek and Roman world, encouraged education and culture, and sought to reconcile the pagan and Christian ideals.

In the archives of Canada, of every province and of every city, there are paper plans that are the ghosts of many bright hopes and many creative ideas. They were laid to rest by official indifference, public apathy, reluctance to spend money on "non-productive" things.

This 107th anniversary would be a good time to turn over the papers again. In an age of transplants they might be injected with new life.

It is not the part of wisdom, and it is not statesman-like, to think that ideal life in Canada can be realized at once. There are some unsettled disputes and open questions. Like good stockholders — and we are all stockholders in the Canadian enterprise — we can analyse our situation on this stock-taking occasion. When we bring out the positive facts about present-day Canada the negatives will look less serious.

Then we can proceed to make a plan for the future years of a country that seeks to be numbered, not with nations that have shaken the world, but with those that have left it more solid than they found it.