

"DO WE NEED AN ARTS CENTRE?"

Address delivered by

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Ever since most Canadians thought it a good idea not to have a revolution like the Americans, we have often prided ourselves on our ability to say "Nay!" We are better at saying what we are not than what we are; we are not American, nor British, nor French -- but beyond that it is courting confusion to ask a Canadian what he is. Or even what he wants to be, except not an American, etc., etc. We are so good at not developing our natural resources that we allow even the Americans to do it for us; and so good at not developing our human resources that we take it for granted young people with talent will get the hell out.

When the head publicist for EXPO '67 was asked what his toughest job had been, he said it was to persuade Canadians that it would happen, that "we could do it." I was reminded of this a few weeks ago when Mr. Allan Lamport, in one of his periodic attempts to persuade us that the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts will never happen, said to his fellow members of Toronto's Board of Control: "It's all very well for these people to have imaginary ideas" -- (I think he meant "imaginative") -- "but we haven't got enough money to have imagination!"

But Mr. Lamport has at least put the question squarely, and it's one with which this country, and this city, must come to grips. What does matter to us? What are the things to which we should say "Yea!"

To judge by the debate in this country about the decline in the value of our dollar, about American ownership of our industry, about distribution of taxes and so on, economics would seem to be our number one concern. But is it? In an interview a short time ago the distinguished Canadian expatriate John Kenneth Galbraith, one of the world's leading economists, made some startling comments on this subject. He was asked.....

- "Q. Should Canadians be concerned more about cultural domination by the United States or about economic domination?
- A. This is an important question and one which I think is very much misunderstood. In good Calvinist fashion, when Canadians talk about cultural autonomy, they really have economics in mind. They follow my friend Walter Gordon and talk about economic autonomy, which on the whole is rather unimportant. It really doesn't exist any more, anywhere in the world. If I were still a practising as distinct from an advisory Canadian I would be much more concerned about maintaining the cultural integrity of the broadcasting system and with making sure Canada has an active, independent theatre, book-publishing industry, newspapers, magazines and schools of poets and painters.

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I would be very much concerned that the widest possible support was given by all levels of government to the preservation of the cultural traditions associated with the particular ethnic groups in Canada, and with French Canada. Also to make sure that Canadian theatre and artists received encouragement. And that people weren't totally dependent on American magazines.

These are the things that are important for the maintenance of cultural autonomy. I wouldn't worry for a moment about the difference between Canadian or American corporations.

Q. But don't you think Canada should make a determined effort to increase its stake in the Canadian economy?

A. I would say this is a very minor consideration as compared with increasing the Canadian stake in the things I've just mentioned. These are the things that count. "

(Quote from WEEK-END MAGAZINE 25th March 1967.)

This revolutionary idea -- that cultural deprivation is more important than economic deprivation; that calling your soul your own is at least as important as calling your money your own -- is no more popular in Canada than most other revolutionary ideas. I recently asked a senior civil servant in Ottawa what, in the current economy drive, would most likely first feel the axe. "Cultural affairs", he replied. If Galbraith is right, this is not only false economy, but national suicide.

The idea may seem strange -- even "imaginative", or "imaginary", as Mr. Lamport might call it -- but it is hardly new. A hundred and fifty years ago, U.S. President John Adams wrote:

"I must study politics and war so that my sons may have the liberty to study mathematics, philosophy and commerce, so their children may have the right and privilege to study painting, poetry and music."

The time President Adams foresaw has already arrived in the United States -- and there is nothing "imaginary" about this. In 1960, 39% of Harvard's senior class entered business after graduation. By 1964 (in only four years, that is to say) the percentage had sunk to 14. In 1966 a national poll in the U.S.A. indicated that only 12% of college seniors were thinking of business careers. By contrast, twice as many wanted careers in teaching and the arts.

Three years ago the Rockefeller Foundation published a Report on the Performing Arts in America, written by a panel -- not of culture-vultures or artists looking for patrons -- but of leaders in the fields of business, industry, labour and government. I beg you to listen carefully to this, gentlemen: for this is not mere high-sounding rhetoric, a Sunday sermon that we may forget about for the rest of the workaday week; it is the manifesto of a very real revolution we had better get with -- or else.

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"The ultimate test of democracy lies in the quality of the artistic and intellectual life it creates and supports. In history's final analysis a nation will be judged by the quality of the civilization it achieves, not by its material well-being. With this realization, has come a general re-evaluation of the role of the arts in society. We are beginning to see them as a culmination of other achievements -- the attainment that in the end gives a society its hope for a lasting place in history, and its people the chance for the fullest freedom and happiness."

Today in Ottawa there commences a conference which will decide the future of Canada. The "ultimate test" is upon us. And I think it has dawned on most of us by now that what the conference is all about has a good deal less to do with economics than it has with that abused word "culture." Suddenly culture -- even in Canada -- has become not a frill, not some game for the wealthy to play on the upper decks of the ship of state, but a matter of survival; for we realise that some Canadians are prepared to die for their culture. The debate is not unlike that recent one in Port Hope, about which you may have read, between students from English-speaking and French-speaking universities; the Globe & Mail report of this is enlightening:

"...the debating teams arguing against Quebec independence were weak and unconvincing. They relied heavily on economic arguments, predicting chaos and disaster through increasing indebtedness, slight of capital, and a net loss of 200 million a year in equalization payments. They said separation would involve 'massive sacrifices of living standards which few would be willing to undergo.' But one of the judges said that warnings of economic disaster had rarely, if ever, deterred a people once they were set on a particular course. He pointed out that Eric Kierans said recently that economic arguments were the worst ones to put to the people of Quebec. And (one of the Quebec debaters) said that, just as Canadians generally accepted a lower standard of living than that of Americans to remain independent of the United States, so the people of Quebec would do the same to assure their own independence."

In brief, concentration on economic problems in this country, and neglect of our cultural affairs, has brought us near the edge of disaster. You may therefore forgive me if I suggest to you, in deadly earnest, that it is time we spent more thought and money on them before it is too late to matter. If we wish to have "a lasting place in history", we had better get busy on those things which can give us pride of place. We had better stop arguing about what things cost, and ask instead if they're worth it, and whether we can afford to do without them.

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The City of Toronto had -- and still has -- as its Centennial Project a perfect case in point. I'd like to tell you its story, briefly: because when one gets down to a particular case -- as in a test case in a court-of-law -- it's often surprising how clear the issues become, how myths dissolve in the light of facts, and how judgement is forced to come to grips with reality.

Way back in 1962 the Toronto Planning Board issued a study of the downtown area. It said in part:

"...Toronto lacks a focal point, a centre of gravity, for the expression of its arts. The proposed development will serve as an important element in the artistic and cultural fabric not only of the immediate region but of the province and, indeed of the nation itself."

The next year, 1963, the Federal and Provincial governments announced per capita grants for municipalities for the erection of Centennial projects -- and these grants were designated, let it be noted, for buildings to be used for cultural purposes only. The \$1,300,000 these grants represented, therefore, was not available for fountains, or parks, or roads or public johns -- or any of the other fascinating and doubtless worthy alternative projects people still from time to time put forward.

In the light of this, the City of Toronto took a most sensible step. A group of public-spirited citizens was asked to form the Toronto Arts Foundation, to conduct an enquiry as to what cultural facilities were most urgently needed, and to oversee the planning and building. I want to make this point quite clear, because there has been much misunderstanding: the City sought out the Toronto Arts Foundation, not vice versa. It was not a case of a bunch of art-lovers trying to sell the City Council a bill of goods; the purpose of the Centennial project was defined by law and the City rightly set up a group of community leaders experienced in these matters to advise them. (I cannot here refrain from paying tribute to this remarkable group of Torontonians, who at great cost in time and energy and with no financial reward whatever, have stuck by the City's Centennial Project -- your Centennial Project -- for over four years of trials, including being called its "backers", "promoters", "plotters", and other names too unsavory for mention at mealtime.)

The Toronto Arts Foundation, then, at the request of the City, commissioned one of our leading management consultant firms to produce "An Assessment of Toronto's Cultural Facilities and Requirements". I mention this because there is much uninformed gossip about to the effect that the St. Lawrence Centre is unnecessary, when as a matter of fact its need -- indeed its urgency -- was established by as hard-headed and disinterested an agency as you could wish for (if the firm of Urwick, Currie won't mind me calling them that).

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The Urwick, Currie Report recommended the erection of a theatre seating 850, and a concert hall seating 500; accommodation for supporting facilities (rehearsal rooms, workshops, storage, etc.) for the Centre and allied theatre, opera and dance companies and for educational instruction; improvements for Massey Hall and the Art Gallery of Toronto; and the restoration of the old St. Lawrence Hall. In July of 1965 the Art Gallery and Massey Hall were deleted from the plan, when it was found that buildings had to stand on City-owned land to be eligible for Centennial grants, whereas both of these sites were owned by private boards of trustees. In January, 1966, renovation of the Old St. Lawrence Hall was taken over by the City under the separate winter works program. This left the theatre, the concert hall (since renamed the Town Hall) and the supporting facilities building. A facilities building was an immediate requirement of one of our putative clients, the National Ballet Company, which had temporarily to get out of its old quarters in the St. Lawrence Hall, so the Toronto Arts Foundation rented a building for them. And then we set about planning the building of the two remaining elements: the theatre and the town hall. I want to emphasize that the seating capacity of these two auditoriums is still that recommended by the Urwick, Currie report; 850 and 500 respectively. There was thus established, finally, as scientifically as possible, an urgent need for a medium-size theatre, a small concert hall, rehearsal and workshop facilities for our important organizations, and educational facilities for our young people.

So let me here knock two other wide-spread myths on the head. Both are contained in the complaint: "We don't need another theatre." You already know (I'll say more about it in a moment) that the Centre is much more than a theatre, it's a complex: that's fallacy number one. Fallacy number two, that we have plenty of theatres already, is spoken out of an ignorance with which I try, like a good teacher, to be patient. We have one huge auditorium, the 3,200 seat O'Keefe Centre, which whatever its virtue for spectacles is totally unsuitable for plays. We have the Royal Alexandra, a finely restored theatre from the turn of the century, splendid for traditional picture-stage productions but the wrong shape for more modern styles, and at almost 1,500 seats twice too large for a resident company. (The theatre in London presently occupied by the National Theatre of Britain, for example, seats only 800.) And from the Royal Alex we drop to the small houses seating well under 500, such as the Bayview Playhouse, the Library Theatre or the Colonnade -- with nothing in between except the auditoriums in our schools and universities, which are seldom if ever available to outside professional users. We have not, in fact, in this great metropolis, the flagship of English-speaking Canada, one single theatre of anything like the proper size and equipment to house a company of our own. Montreal -- if I dare mention the name in this company -- has several.

But back to my story. The Toronto Arts Foundation undertook a public campaign to raise 2,300,000 dollars -- an unheard of sum in Canada -- and in five months. (To put this in perspective, the Stratford Festival raised 1,000,000 dollars in five years.) The campaign raised, by the deadline, only 1,700,000 dollars; but this was still the largest amount ever raised from Johnny Q. Public for a similar enterprise in Canada --

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which ought to knock on the head another myth: that the general public was apathetic and uninterested.

If further proof is needed, it can be found in the fidelity with which those more than 2,000 contributors have stood by their pledges throughout more than a year of delays and set-backs; this very morning we received further payment of \$5,000 on a much larger pledge from one of the nation's largest corporations -- this hardly suggests lack of confidence. And it can be proved by the enthusiasm which has led many new subscribers to contribute since then, despite attempts by the Centre's detractors, in and out of civic office, to spread the word of its demise; last week we received a new donation for \$500 -- and it came from a New Canadian society, not from a rich art patron.

When in November, 1966, the design for the St. Lawrence Centre was approved by the City Council -- by an almost two-thirds majority, incidentally -- and was put out to tender, the lowest bid came in at about \$2,900,000 over the available funds. This sort of overage was experienced all across Canada last year, of course; and Toronto's estimate turned out to be a good deal closer to the mark than that of the National Centre in Ottawa, for example, which went from \$14 million to three times that, or the Province of Ontario's Centennial Science Museum, which has already gone from \$14,000,000 to \$30,000,000. But nonetheless the City of Toronto took the position that no more money was available, so the Toronto Arts Foundation set out to see what could be done within the available budget. We found that by combining the buildings on one site (the less expensive site on the south side of Front Street next door to the O'Keefe Centre), we could make many savings, including the cost of the site known as the Gore, on the north side of Front Street. We therefore came back to the Board of Control last fall with a Modified Plan, showing the City that we could build within available funds if they could take the \$970,000 Gore site off our hands.

Since then, as I am sure many of you know, the City and the Foundation approached the Federal Government for help in achieving this; and that government, anxious to assist Toronto in its down-town renewal plans, suggested that the Centre be included in the first phase of an urban renewal project to which the Federal and Provincial governments would together contribute three-quarters of the land costs. This study is now in progress, with the enthusiastic help and support of the senior levels of government, and will be submitted for their approval by mid-March. The Centre, though by no means the only project included, will be one of the important ones.

Meantime, the Toronto Arts Foundation has been developing detailed plans for the new Modified project, with the enterpid co-operation of the architects, Gordon S. Adamson & Associates; and a firm price has been negotiated with the lowest (indeed the only complete) bidder, Redfern Construction Company, so that we may never again get caught in a vicious spiral of rising costs. With a little good luck we can be digging by some time in April.

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That good luck includes a sympathetic re-hearing by the whole of City Council, which will have to pass on the whole down-town renewal plan and on our own Modified Plan for the Centre. Now I know that our City Council has many important matters contending for an already slim budget, taken from the pockets of already overburdened tax-payers; I know that on it sit a few die-hards who will always consider the arts a frill, and are unconcerned about the cultural deprivation of their community; I know that others, hard-working, just haven't had the time to think about it much; I know of others -- and I'm greatly in sympathy with their point-of-view -- who say, "Let's have it so long as we aren't asked to fork out any more money than we've allocated". But I am confident that reasonable men and women can be swayed by reasonable arguments.

What are those arguments? With very few exceptions, discussion so far has concentrated on the money being spent, and not on what it is buying -- the very same economic syndrome I spoke of earlier today. It strikes me as curious that we are prepared to pay \$15,000,000 for a cloverleaf, but wrangle over less than six million for an Arts Centre -- as if a road to somewhere were more important than what happens at the end of it.

Let us ask for a change, as I suggested earlier, what that money is buying, ask whether it is not a bargain, and ask whether in fact we can afford to do without it.

First of all, what kind of a city is this that we live in? Among other things it is home base for one of the nation's two internationally famous orchestras, for the National Ballet Company, the Canadian Opera Company, the English language network of the CBC, the nation's largest university, the Canadian National Exhibition; it is the centre of English-language publishing, film production and recording, and (according to the New York journal Variety) "the third largest talent pool in North America following New York and Hollywood." Around the media of communications cluster the taste-makers for a whole nation.

As the Hon. Mitchell Sharp has said:

"In my view Toronto must learn to take on to an increasing extent responsibilities of the metropolitan centre in English-speaking Canada; just as Montreal is the metropolitan centre for French-speaking Canada . . . . Whether the people of Toronto or Montreal like it or not, and whether other parts of the country like it or not, these two great cities cannot escape their responsibilities for the quality of Canadian life . . . . We still do not yet fully recognize our own importance in the Canadian scheme of things or our resulting responsibility to the rest of the country. If Toronto cannot provide a home for Canadian theatre, a training for Canadian actors, a living for Canadian artists, what other community can?"

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Well, apparently Winnipeg can, Vancouver can, Ottawa can, Calgary and Edmonton can -- but there seems to be doubt in some small minds whether poor old Toronto can. And yet in all this wide country we have no theatre devoted to our own plays for our own audiences -- that is to say, if we are to develop those signs of creative expression which give a country what Mr. Sharp called its quality; if we are to talk to each other in a common language; if we are to contribute something useful and different to the world's cultural mosaic, this sort of thing remains as a challenge and a responsibility for the nation's largest English-speaking city.

And this is how we propose to meet it. The St. Lawrence Centre will be no theatre for casual rental to the highest bidder, wherever he comes from, nor a concert hall for well-heeled devotees of chamber music, but a coordinated project to meet some urgent needs in this community of ours. First, we need a medium-sized theatre where we can present our own plays, give our playwrights a voice and our actors a chance to speak in their own accents and ours. Such a company would, of course, travel to other centres, thus freeing the theatre for engagements by other companies from here and elsewhere. The theatre has been superbly designed, and will be one which architects and theatre people from all over the world will wish to study, just as they have studied our Stratford Festival theatre. In it we will have productions for children and youth as well as adults, and it will provide a home for some of our film societies.

The Town Hall will provide a meeting place for the community, especially for our young people (it is more than twice as large as the old St. Lawrence Hall). It will house concerts both classical and popular, forums, demonstrations, lectures, mixed media presentations, films and a wide variety of other activities -- all keyed in with community organizations all the way from the Canadian Institute for International Affairs to our school system.

Then we shall have in addition the rented Facilities Building, providing absolutely essential services for the city's principal performing arts organizations, including those with a national responsibility such as the National Ballet and Canadian Opera companies. Indeed we have taken very seriously the responsibility to serve three masters: the community, the province and the nation. A Universities Committee has been set up under the chairmanship of President Bissell of the University of Toronto, to guide the Centre in becoming an experiment in total community involvement unique, so far as I know, in the world.

There is, however, a desperate need to provide training for our talented young people. At the moment the talent drain from this country is every bit as serious as the brain drain; and its economic implications are quite as serious. We spend thousands of dollars on the education of our youngsters and then tell them, "Sorry, but we cannot provide you with the opportunity to practice in this country, so you had better go abroad." Right now the Metropolitan

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Toronto School Board is discussing the erection of a school for the performing arts. If it comes about, the St. Lawrence Centre will be one of the key agencies cooperating with it. If it does not come about, the St. Lawrence Centre may well have to commence such a school itself. We need both a school and a place for its graduates to show their wares -- we can no longer afford the luxury of kicking out our brightest talents just when they are about to return dividends.

Nor can we afford any longer the false economy which prefers to save nickels rather than create dollars. Tourism is in many parts of the country the number one industry, and in other parts it is the second. Tourists come to see what they cannot see at home -- namely, what we can do. We need a place to show them. The Financial Post has noted that in Stratford, Ontario, twenty-four new industries have located there recently, very largely as a result of the prestige given to the city by the Festival. The editorial goes on to say:

"This has led to the improvement of downtown properties, the replanning of the city centre, new restaurants and many specialty shops. The Stratford Chamber of Commerce estimates that festival visitors spend, over and above theatre admissions, \$3 million in Stratford for sleeping and eating accommodation and shopping. They estimate that 80% of the \$750,000 payroll of the festival stays in Stratford. Another way in which the festival has benefitted the community is attested to by many of the city's leading businessmen. They say that when they give Stratford as their address, anywhere in Canada or the U.S., corporate doors are thrown open because of the prestige and publicity which the festival has brought to Stratford."

I do not know how many of you have found the name "Toronto" to produce the same effect.

Finally, I would submit to you that the benefits I have listed above create a figure on the profit side of the ledger which is not to be measured by the box-office take of any theatre or concert hall. Aside from Broadway, which is more like a horse-race than any other kind of human activity, there is no nation or province or city on the face of the globe that expects the drama, opera, ballet or the symphony orchestra to pay for itself. They can no more be expected to do so than parks, or public swimming pools or skating rinks or zoos or schools and universities, or any other necessary amenities of a decent life. This is so in America or in Europe or Asia, regardless of the political system. In most cities the purchase of tickets makes up only between one third and one half of the revenue. The rest must come from public funds.

I am often asked why we should subsidize our artists, the suggestion being that artists think society owes them a living. Actually the reverse is the situation at the moment: our artists are subsidizing their society. A dancer in the Corps de Ballet of our National

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Ballet Company makes from \$54 - \$71 a week -- or a good deal less than most of you pay your secretary; and this is after a rigorous training over many years. All but a handful of the members in our Toronto Symphony Orchestra get paid \$125 per week for 32 weeks of the year, or \$4,000 per year; and it takes more time and money to train an instrumentalist than a doctor or a lawyer. This is how we reward those who uphold what claim we have to civilization -- and we should be ashamed of ourselves.

What those public funds are buying is our own future and the future of our children and their children. What those funds are buying is "The attainment that in the end gives a society its hope for a lasting place in history, and its people the chance for the fullest freedom and happiness."

I am sorry if these ideas sound radical to you, but it is already a quarter of a century since Sir Herbert Read, that remarkable British prophet, said:

"Art is always the index of social vitality, the moving finger that records the destiny of a civilization. A wise statesman should keep an anxious eye on this graph, for it is more significant than a decline in exports or a fall in the value of the nation's currency."

I am only quoting the Mayor of this city when I say: "The St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts will be built." My own last word is that I think the city is getting one hell of a good bargain.

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