

"OF THINGS TO COME"

*A Citizens' Forum on Canada in the
Post-war World*

Bulletin No. 19

Who Shapes the Future?

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Who Shapes the Future

As the post-war period comes ever more swiftly towards us, Canadians are reaching a greater measure of agreement about post-war objectives than ever before. Farmers, labour, professional and business organizations have expressed themselves in favour of social security plans, re-housing schemes, planning for full employment, and so on. There is little serious disagreement now among the Canadian people about the nature of our post-war objectives.

There is, however, some uncertainty about how we shall achieve these ends. Almost everyone assumes that there will have to be extensive government planning and control for at least the period of transition from war to peace. Most of our schemes for improvement, health insurance, better educational facilities and so forth, simply can't be carried out unless there is over-all planning and coordination. In many cases the money will have to be collected by the government either at the national or provincial level.

More Control If we were to make a list of the areas in which there is widest public support for government control in the post-war period, we would have to name: *rationing* of foodstuffs, if this is necessary to provide food for starving Europe and Asia; *planned cooperative production and marketing of agricultural produce*, on a world scale; plans on a national scale for the *conversion of war-industry* to peace-time purposes, particularly in areas where the government has been operating Crown Companies, or buying directly from private companies; *job placement controls*, in coordination with unemployment insurance offices and the re-training schemes for ex-servicemen; *health insurance*; *monetary stabilization*; the *organization of world trade* on an orderly basis; participation in the United Nations, or some out-growth of them, for the *organization of world peace*. In your Citizens' Forum reports, you have recognized that government control will be necessary after the war in many areas.

Fears Even though they recognize this necessity, many people have fears about how this will work out. Business men, for example, often feel that government control means bureaucracy with tangles of red-tap and mountains of complicated forms to fill out.

Labour and agriculture have shown a certain amount of apprehension on another score. They are afraid that government control will amount to big business running the country in its own special interest. Labour and agriculture are concerned that all sections of the community should be fairly represented on controlling bodies.

Many people have fears which are a little more vague. They arise out of a sense of frustration, of powerlessness to have any effect over the social forces which mould our lives. Their reaction is that of the little man tossed around by currents which he doesn't understand. Rightly or wrongly many people feel that governments push the individual around—that the nation's affairs are run from Ottawa, and the ordinary man doesn't have much to say in what goes on. Full employment, monetary stabilization, the balance of trade—matters like this seem so complicated that the average man doesn't know what to think about them.

NEW TIMES, NEW WAYS

This is a common reaction to the increasing complexity and interdependence of life in the 20th century. Modern scientific developments in transportation, communication, and methods of producing goods have created a world in which events in far-off lands have devastating and mysterious effects on our own daily lives. We no longer spend our days within the bounds of a narrow community. In our sprawling cities and large towns we hardly know our neighbours personally, let alone the people who represent us in Parliament. Our security is smashed overnight by a depression or a war. Governments take action on problems which seem remote from what we know about in our own experience. Innumerable boards and agencies are set up in Ottawa, and their long arm reaches right into our household life.

This gulf which seems to have arisen between the people and their government is one of the greatest perils which we face. As two young writers have said:

" . . . only the people themselves can, by their own efforts, shape a democratic future. No elite, be it of wealth or brains or power, is necessary to—nor for that matter, can—dragoon mankind into a progressive social order. The common people collectively have the ability—and if they will it, the power—to fashion their own destiny. That is our abiding faith as democrats." (From *Strategy for Democracy*, by Kingsley and Petegorsky)

History has proved that unless everyone plays his part in a democracy, it will wither and die. The Fascists have been jeering at us for years, saying that we aren't really democracies at all, that we're run by the wealthy and the Jews. They say that the idea of everyone taking part in the running of society is absurd and impossible. They say we need a Leader. And their propaganda sometimes falls on receptive ears.

For a great many people the central question on the agenda of the future is not: *should there be planning?* but rather: *in whose interest, and by whom, will the planning be done—*by a minority group or by the people as a whole? Will the Canadian people

achieve mastery over their own destiny, and shape the future in a pattern which will contribute to the well-being of all?

PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT

The first fact to be recognized is that unless we understand a thing, we can't control it. A man has to know how the gears work before he can drive a car. He has to know what will happen when he presses his foot on the accelerator, or he will find himself against a telegraph pole.

In public affairs many of us didn't understand how things worked. For example, we didn't foresee that shutting foreign goods out of our markets would mean that other countries couldn't find money to buy the things we were making, and our own factories would eventually have to close down. There are certain elementary facts about the way our economic system works which we must grasp, or we won't be able to make it go in the direction we want it to.

Many of the social and economic problems we shall have to tackle are not really as complicated as they appear to be. Experts may use a difficult vocabulary when they talk about full employment. Actually, this problem is simply the question of how our manpower can be fully harnessed to use our resources to meet our needs. Many of us who have been in Citizens' Forums will recognize that systematic study and discussion has given us the factual background for arriving at opinions about public matters.

So the starting point for democratic participation in the processes of government is sound opinion based on facts about things as they are. But that is not nearly enough. Even if we arrive at sound opinions, will they carry any weight in the framing of national policies?

Well, there are three or four simple ways in which almost everyone can have some effect on government.

Public Opinion One of the great virtues of the democratic system is that the people elect the government.

Politicians must get votes, therefore they are extremely sensitive to the opinions of the voters. The hurried introduction in Parliament of so-called "vote-catching measures" when an election looms up is ample evidence of this. Yet we often fail to keep before our representatives in Parliament the wishes of the people who elected them. We have sometimes failed to recognize the power of public opinion. Public opinion simply means opinions expressed in public by numbers of people. Letters, if they come in by the thousands, resolutions from organizations, delegations to interview officials—all these are ways in which the public can bring their opinions directly to bear on the law-makers. We, the citizens, can run the country.

Local Boards Most national controls have to be applied in local communities. Rationing, for example, is planned in Ottawa, but it becomes effective only when it reaches us in our neighbourhood store. It has been found necessary to set up local ration boards in every community, to distribute the ration books, deal with special shortages in the area, to instruct people about how rationing works. The national law is translated into action by local boards who administer it. Whether the law seems arbitrary or useful depends in many instances on the way a local board undertakes its responsibilities, and the kind of cooperation it gets from us. Weaknesses or injustice in a legal provision are more readily apparent to a local board than to the executive in Ottawa who has had to draft something which will fit the whole country.

So here, through the work of local boards and committees, is another place where we can fit into the new processes of democratic government. Here is where we can make things work democratically and efficiently. Here is where we can spot the improvements which may still need to be made.

Actually, it goes further than this. If re-housing is to be carried out, the plans will have to be drawn up not by men in Ottawa alone, but by thousands of us setting out to see what we need and what we can accomplish in our own community. We will discuss this type of community action more extensively next week.

THE PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATIONS

In our political life today, the most important part is played not by individuals acting alone, but by organized groups representing particular sections of the community. Many deplore the existence of "pressure groups", lobbying vigorously for the kind of legislation they want. But this is a characteristic of our political life which must be reckoned with. It is probably here to stay. It need not mean that government will be responsive only to the voice of "big interests", providing all sections of the community make their voices heard in Ottawa. During the post-war period it will be doubly important that all groups in our country make their particular contribution to framing policies which will ensure prosperity and security.

Business Business is of course one of the most highly organized sections of the population. The Canadian Manufacturers' Association, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and numerous other associations representing particular industries, have for years been exerting pressure to secure the measures which seem to them essential for their welfare, and hence for the welfare of the whole country. As some of their submissions to the Parliamentary Committees indicate, they have carried on realistic thinking about post-war problems, and have specific proposals to make. You have in earlier discussions already reviewed some of these proposals.

It is evident that many sections of the business community have decided that the transition to peace must be carried out in an orderly way, and so planning will be necessary. Because they actually own and manage the productive equipment in this country, they bear a heavy responsibility in the task of achieving full employment. If they are able to conceive their interests as identified with the welfare of the whole population rather than dominated solely by profit-seeking, their contribution to the solution of post-war problems will be a constructive one.

Agriculture The people on the land have kept us well fed during the war, and have contributed huge supplies of food to our allies. The whole population depends on their efforts. It will do so in the period of peace just as it has during the war. Yet these are the people who suffer very heavily when prosperity deserts us. They have a very great stake in the post-war period.

We have already noted the contribution made by the farmers' central organization—the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, to post-war planning, particularly in relation to health insurance. This organization is anxious that the farmer shall get a square deal after the war. Who knows, better than the farmers themselves, what must be done to ensure them a good living, and proper community facilities for recreation and education? Their voice must be clearly heard, and we must pay heed to what they suggest.

Labour In many respects, the people who work in industry are like the base of a pyramid, which supports the entire superstructure. Every detail of our daily life depends on the labour of countless thousands of Canadians. Our clothes, houses, books, telephones, radios, are the work of their hands. During the war they have kept the wheels turning, and munitions going to the front. Through their trade-unions and labour-management committees they have assumed responsibility for maximum production. They have often borne a far heavier share in the sacrifices entailed by the war than some other sections of the community: the rising costs of living, pegged wages, overtime work, crowded transportation, and countless other conditions have pressed heavily on working people. Working people have been the spearhead of our war-effort; they must be the spearhead of our peace-effort.

The two Labour Congresses have already expressed themselves quite extensively on post-war problems. They favour the maximum use of our natural resources to raise the standard of living of the whole nation. They stand for better nutrition, better housing, better education for everyone. This is a healthy sign indicating the increasing maturity of the trade-union movement. It is becoming more concerned about general community problems, and less completely occupied with the struggle for union recognition, higher wages, and so on.

One of the severest tests of the vitality of our democracy is how far organized labour is represented in the boards and agencies which control the war-effort, and those which will organize the peace. Labour codes, for instance, will be unlikely either to meet the needs of the situation or be acceptable to the working people, if the unions are not given a chance to help draw them up, and explain them to their fellow-workers. Suggestions from the man at the bench have often cut hours off the production of an airplane part; his suggestions about the efficient conversion of wartime industry to peacetime production might be of real value. Working people have nothing to lose and everything to gain by the defeat of fascism and the extension of democracy. They are a mighty force for progress in the post-war world.

Professional Associations Many of us in middle-class groups are professionals of one sort or another. Some of us participate in professional associations of teachers, doctors, social workers, or lawyers. These organizations can make an important contribution. Many of them have already done so. The cooperation of the medical profession is absolutely necessary if health insurance is to work out. Teachers have said in no uncertain terms what improvements need to be made in education.

The great weakness of professional associations has sometimes been the narrow focus of their interests—on the status and ethics of their occupation, rather than on the general conditions which either facilitate or frustrate their efforts. But that day is waning, as they come to realize that crises in society affect them severely.

Of course thousands upon thousands of Canadians do not fall into any neat category of organizations. There are the store-clerks and the stenographers, the housewives and the fishermen, the owner of the cross-roads store, and many others. But all of them live in communities of some sort. And all of us will have to take action on post-war problems at the community level. This is where they enter our own backyard. This is what we shall discuss next week, in our last Citizens' Forum topic, "Action Now."

MORE INFORMATION

Canada After the War: ed. by Brady and Scott. Macmillan, Toronto, 1944. Note particularly Chapters I, II and III, on national policy, parliamentary democracy, and constitutional problems.

The Farmer Citizen at War: by Howard R. Tolley. Macmillan, Toronto, 1943. \$3.75. The role of American farmers in the war and post-war.

The Unarmed Forces: by D. M. Young. Behind the Headlines Series, available at 198 College St., Toronto, 10c. Labour's war-effort.

The Democratic Way: Three pamphlets on citizenship in our democracy. Available at 198 College St., Toronto, 10c.

FILMS**POWER AND THE LAND**

An United States Government film about rural electrification.
(Running time—40 minutes)

REPORT QUESTIONS

1. In what ways do you think you could participate more actively in making democracy work?
2. In the light of your past months' discussion of post-war plans, in what areas do you now think controls will be necessary if we are to provide security at home and carry out our international obligations?
3. Do you think national controls, such as rationing, selective service, etc., are operating efficiently and democratically in your community? If it becomes necessary for similar controls to be continued for some time after the war, are there any improvements which you would suggest?

SEND YOUR ANSWERS TO YOUR PROVINCIAL OFFICE

THINGS TO DO

Examine the way democracy works in your own community, in municipal affairs: its good points, its weaknesses, the improvements needed. A report of your fact-finding might be submitted to your municipal council, or to your community as a whole.

FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. We have mentioned some of the fears people have about extensive government control. Do you think there are any grounds for these anxieties?
2. Melvin Rader says regarding labour: "No other class in the community stands to gain so much from a new equalitarian social order; the struggle of the workers is therefore the fundamental dynamic that can lift society to the level of classless humanism. On the other hand, there is no other class that stands to lose so much from the unequalitarian practices of Fascism; consequently no other class can be depended on to oppose so resolutely the forces that perpetuate and intensify social oppression." Discuss the implications of this statement.
3. What are the responsibilities of business in achieving a vital Canadian democracy?
4. Do you think professional associations have responsibilities for the welfare of the whole community, or should their main purpose be to regulate the conduct of their own members?

Next Week: ACTION NOW!