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1. Canadian Renewal: The Special Role  
of Communications and Culture

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of Communications and Culture 8

Report on the Workshop  
held on April 11, 1991  
in the Palais des congrès  
Hull, Québec

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**Acknowledgements**

The Strategic Planning Workshop on Canadian Renewal benefited from the participation of many individuals throughout the Department.

I would particularly like to thank the Director General, Strategy and Plans, **Eileen Sarkar**, who agreed to chair the workshop and whose efforts in putting together the day's program were instrumental in its success. Thanks are also extended to the **Deputy Minister and the members of senior management's Strategy Committee**, who lent their support to the idea of this workshop and made several useful suggestions regarding agenda and speakers.

Also appreciated were the contributions of the team who planned and organized the day -- **Sharon Jeannotte, Brenda Patterson, Suzanne Loranger, Jacques Drouin and Suzy Beaugard**.

As always, the day could not have been a success without the participation of **all those who attended the workshop**, and I would therefore be remiss if I did not thank the speakers and the DOC employees who took the time to share their ideas and opinions on Canadian renewal.

David Waung  
Director  
Strategic Policy Planning

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## Executive Summary

In the May 1991 Speech from the Throne, the Governor General said we are at "a turning point in Canadian history". The Workshop on Canadian Renewal looked at the factors that had brought the country to this turning point and asked how this climate of change was likely to affect the Department of Communications.

Canada has faced problems before, but today it must contend with several coinciding factors that make renewal urgent. One, Canadians are expressing **deep pessimism** about the future of the country and about governments' ability to solve the problem. Two, the **economic health of the country** is being affected by major structural changes in the global economy - challenges which Canada cannot afford to ignore. Three, **the cultural fabric of the country is changing** and the construction of shared cultural values is becoming increasingly difficult.

Overlying this scenario is a **more restive and assertive Canadian public**. That public is not prepared to be dictated to by governments. It wants a say in the policies and programs that affect it. At the same time, the youngest and most "modern" elements of the population in Quebec and in the rest of Canada - while they share many of the same social attitudes and values - are suggesting **different political and institutional routes to the goal of social renewal**. Opinion leaders in Quebec believe that more power should reside at the level of government closest to them. In the rest of Canada, opinion leaders do not favour special powers for any region or province.

With regard to DOC's role in a renewed Canada, the workshop drew a number of conclusions:

- 1) DOC's policies and programs in both communications and culture would have to be adjusted to concentrate on **national standards and on the distribution systems which help Canadians to share their ideas, information and dreams**;
- 2) Careful thought will have to be given to the **differing cultural needs of Quebec and the rest of Canada** and to how these can be accommodated in actual practice;
- 3) DOC's **cultural policies and programs would have to become more transparent and inclusive of more cultural groups**;
- 4) The **CBC** is the only institution within the Communications portfolio that is **widely viewed as a major contributor to interchange and understanding** among the regions and as an important national symbol. **Increased effort should be devoted to interchange activities by other parts of the portfolio** to enhance sharing among Canadians and to raise their level of awareness about common values and aspirations.

There was general agreement that this shift would have to be accomplished within existing resources and it would be **incumbent upon each responsibility centre in the Department to examine its programs and policies and to adjust them appropriately**. Strategically speaking, the onus is upon the Department to be part of the renewal process - a process which appears to be driven more by individual Canadians than by the traditional elite power-brokers of the past.

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## Introduction

### Canadian Renewal: A Country Coming of Age?

The Strategic Planning Workshop on Canadian Renewal was organized to help the Department of Communications develop a better sense of the direction it should be heading if it is to continue to respond to Canadian needs. The workshop examined the public mood with regard to the Canadian federation. It reviewed the public policy context of constitutional change. Most importantly, it focussed on the role that communications and culture would likely play in a changing Canada.

Participants at the workshop discovered many things about Canada and Canadians -- some of them startling and some of them familiar. What emerged at the end of the day was **a portrait of a country that is maturing**, a country whose people have passed the stage where they must be told what to do. **Canadians want to be empowered and to have a say in how they are governed and what they consume.** They are more sophisticated and better informed than their parents, and they appear to be growing more impatient with "big governments" and "big businesses" that try to tell them what to do or how to think.

A new reality is emerging. It will be futile to try to adjust that reality to suit our policies. Our challenge will be instead to adjust our policies to fit that reality.

This report will examine the changing cultural, economic and social context of Canada, the shifts in public attitudes and values that are driving these changes, and the implications of these changes for the Department of Communications.

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## *Shifting Realities*

### 1. The Challenge of Canadian Federalism

The workshop included presentations by representatives of the Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future and the Decima and CROP polling firms. The picture that emerged from their surveys was of a more volatile Canadian public.

A wide variety of polls show that 80 per cent of Canadians continue to identify themselves first as Canadians and only secondly as citizens of their provinces. However, about 8 in 10 Canadians claim to feel closer to their provincial governments than to Ottawa.

The polls up to April 1991 also demonstrate that concern about Canadian unity is rising, and **the mood of Canadians reflects a profound degree of pessimism about the future of the Canadian federation.** About 70 per cent of the population of Quebec believes that separation of that province is likely. This view is shared by over 40 per cent of the Canadian population as a whole. More than half of all Quebecers believe that the rest of Canada (TROC) is not committed to national unity, and 60 per cent interpret the failure to pass the Meech Lake Accord as a rejection of Quebec. On the other hand, close to 80 per cent of Canadians in TROC do not view the failure of Meech as a rejection of Quebec. They are, however, becoming increasingly unwilling to consider special measures to keep Quebec in the federation. One in three would refuse any concessions at all. About half are willing to negotiate, but would not agree to any special status for Quebec within Canada.

This apparently large gap between the attitudes of Quebecers and Canadians in the rest of the country is exacerbated by **perceived instability at the political level.** The constitutional reform proposals of the Allaire and Bélanger-Campeau Reports clearly outlined Quebecers' discontent with the current division of powers between the federal and provincial governments.

As one speaker pointed out, in the past, Ottawa could usually count on the other provinces to support its constitutional position. However, it may be harder to build such alliances in the post-Meech environment.

### 2. Social and Economic Concerns

Despite growing concern about national unity, the polls show that **most Canadians still view the economy as the number one problem facing the country.** It is certainly true that globalization in all areas of the economy, including communications and culture, is affecting Canada's prosperity. It is becoming more difficult to compete with multinational corporations that disseminate information instantaneously throughout the world. Yet, while Canadians view with apprehension rising unemployment and closing factories, many have not made the critical linkages between these problems and the social and political environment in which they exist.

Most of Canada's major social problems fall into areas of provincial jurisdiction where federal involvement is often viewed as an irritant. Yet, (as indicated in the Speech from the Throne) **certain social program priorities**, such as a national training program to prepare Canadians to compete in a global economy or environmental protection, **will have a critical impact on the economic health of the country and will clearly require a coordinated approach.** Limited federal government



resources, coupled with the huge federal debt, make it unlikely that "chequebook federalism" can be used to solve all social and economic problems. Nevertheless, these issues will have to be tackled in a renewed Canada, and in any new partnership arrangements that evolve.

Finally, a renewed Canada will be a more diverse Canada. Changing demographics make that inevitable. Nearly one-third of Canadians now have ethnic origins that are neither English nor French. More of the population, especially its **visible minorities**, is being concentrated in urban areas. The **growing concern among minorities about human rights** will require a more consultative and inclusive approach to policy making at all government levels, even as resources are shrinking. At the same time, those outside the major urban centres -- **rural Canadians or Canadians in the "have not" regions** -- are not likely to diminish their demands for their fair share of wealth and services.

### 3. The Empowered Canadian

**Canadians are expressing the desire for greater control over the public agenda** as a consequence of their diminishing faith in political leadership. They wish to see greater fairness and equity, particularly as this relates to social justice and individual rights. They appear unwilling to tolerate perceived "power grabs" by individuals or institutions, and in English Canada this is affecting their reaction to the constitutional reform proposals emerging from Quebec.

There is a sense among the pollsters and within the Spicer Commission that **formerly unifying Canadian symbols, such as bilingualism and multiculturalism, are eroding**. Canadians from all parts of the country are expressing **increased impatience with the notion of "hyphenated Canadianism"**, and have been telling the Spicer Commission that more must be done by the government to include more groups within a broader definition of Canadianism. Quebecers want this inclusiveness to be focussed at the provincial level, insisting that immigrants learn French and use it in their daily lives. Canadians in TROC tend to look upon this as a national, rather than a provincial problem and are becoming more vocal about the need for immigrant integration to form part of the federal government's nation-building activity.

While many of the polls are indicating a decreased sense of commonality between Quebec and the rest of Canada, there are at the same time **many surprising similarities between the social profiles of the sovereignists in Quebec and federalists in the rest of the country**. Both groups include large numbers of individuals who are opinion leaders and who score high on the values and lifestyles of the "me generation". They value personal autonomy and individual rights; they believe in fairness and equality of the sexes; and they protect the environment while practising discriminating consumerism.

However, **at the political level, these values have translated into different agendas**. In Quebec, the socially progressive elements appear to want personal autonomy strengthened through transfer of power to the level of government closest to it. In the rest of Canada, this same demographic segment appears to be emphasizing "fairness" and is therefore against special status for any region or province.

Aside from the split on questions of political power and structure, the "me generation" in both Quebec and the rest of Canada share a decreased connection to traditional Canadian symbols such as the monarchy. Neither wants to be forced to accept the same norms and standards as everyone else,

and this appears to be contributing to growing support for greater provincial autonomy, even among committed federalists outside of Quebec.

At the same time, **the values that define Canadian identity appear to be undergoing a significant change.** A 1990 CROP survey asked whether being Canadian was an important part of the respondent's personal identity. Fully 93 per cent of Canadians and 75 per cent of Quebecers rated being Canadian as important. Even 50 per cent of those Quebecers who considered themselves sovereignists agreed that being Canadian was an important part of their identity. Given these responses, the pollster could only conclude that **Canadians are beginning to define their "Canadian-ness" in terms that are less political and more personal.**

The word "**empowerment**" tended to recur throughout the discussion of changing Canadian attitudes, and it was suggested that **the "renewed Canadian" would be a person with more respect for individual rights and diversity, a greater sense of fairness and a more participative attitude to governance.** A growing aversion to being forced into rigid institutional moulds appears to be translating into increased support for decentralization, whether within or outside the current federal structure.

The discussion suggested that Canadian identity may not, in fact, be eroding but merely evolving. In public policy terms, the workshop participants generally agreed that governments would have to adjust to these new realities, rather than trying to adjust realities to suit public policies. In this spirit, a good part of the day was devoted to a discussion of how this transformation would affect the role of the Department of Communications.

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## *Building Bridges*

### The Role of the Department of Communications in a Renewed Canada

#### 1. Helping Canadians to share their ideas, information and dreams

The question of DOC's role in a renewed Canada was debated in terms of the Department's Mission "Nation-Building: Helping Canadians to share their ideas, information and dreams".

Many participants were surprised to hear outsiders interpreting the Department's current role as one of trying to impose a single, national culture on Canadians. They were quick to point out that, far from imposing "one culture", **the Mission, in principle as well as in practice, aimed at putting in place the conditions for development and dissemination of culture in all its forms.** The scope of this sharing was not limited simply to cultural expression, but extended to the economic and social spheres as well. However, it became apparent that this role did not seem to be well-understood by Canadians or even, perhaps, by public servants themselves. (See discussion under section 3 "Many Cultures" below.)

In operational terms, it was suggested that **the role of DOC in both culture and communications would have to be adjusted to concentrate on national standards and on the distribution systems which allow Canadians to share their ideas, information and dreams both nationally and internationally.** For example, one speaker felt that the federal government had in the past been overly eager to hand out money for creative activity without addressing the underlying structural problems that the arts and the cultural industries have faced for many years. Until certain structural adjustments were made, it was suggested, the Mission would not be completely fulfilled.

#### 2. Symmetry versus Asymmetry

Agreement on the **aim** of the Mission did not imply, however, a consensus on **how** it could be accomplished. Inevitably, the discussion moved beyond broad generalities to focus on the particular demands being made in the context of constitutional reform. First, could Quebec's needs be accommodated within the current cultural and communications framework? Second, would devolution of greater power to all the provinces in the cultural field improve the environment for the cultural industries in Canada?

In response to the first question, one speaker argued that "the motor of the distinct society in Quebec is the cultural industries" and that some type of asymmetrical arrangement would inevitably be required to deal with this fact. It was pointed out in the course of this discussion that recognition of Quebec's distinct needs did not necessarily have to be **constitutional** recognition. Administrative accords, financial compensation or other types of **asymmetric administrative arrangements** might be just as effective and much easier to accomplish. However, at the federal level, it would be necessary to determine the **most important elements of the DOC nation-building role** and ensure that they are preserved. The goal should be to ensure the best possible outcome for all Canadians, including Quebecers.

In reference to the second question, it was suggested that the cultural industries have never been considered as part of the "economic union" of Canada and therefore little effort has been put into

enhancing their market potential. According to this analysis, the cultural industries in English Canada cannot thrive in the small Canadian market without aggregation of resources and government support. Therefore, symmetrical devolution to the provinces would only lead to greater fragmentation and would be, as one speaker termed it, "a catastrophe". On the French language side, one speaker insisted, the cultural industries are already in an asymmetrical situation, and the presence of national cultural institutions, such as the CBC, has done little to create a "second market" outside of Quebec for French language productions. The solution in this case, it was suggested, was **continued concurrency in the cultural field, with a more complementary definition of federal and provincial roles and a greater concentration by the federal government on structural measures to improve the market position of the cultural industries throughout Canada.**

Although the discussion appeared to suggest the logic of an asymmetric approach, at least in the cultural industries, it was recognized that such an approach is unlikely to be favoured by the majority of Canadians -- assuming the findings of the pollsters and the Spicer Commission are accurate. One speaker believed that discussions in broad, theoretical terms were not helpful and that the only way to determine what will be supported is to put concrete proposals on the table for consideration. For example, should responsibility for local cable be devolved to the provinces? Should the English and French arms of the CBC continue to have a common administration?

### 3. Many Cultures

Throughout the day's discussions, it was apparent that Canadians' concerns about a renewed Canada extended far beyond the constitutional question of the division of powers. They were particularly troubled by a perception of **exclusion**: that certain cultures were "official" while others were "minority" and that **diversity** was being encouraged at the expense of **integration**. Canadians recognize and welcome Canada's cultural diversity, but they want to see aboriginal peoples treated more fairly and ethnic minorities brought more into the cultural mainstream.

It was suggested that **the Department of Communications' cultural policies and programs would therefore have to become more transparent and inclusive of more cultural groups.** The Department would have to become more visibly an instrument of "sharing", permitting all Canadians to communicate their values and priorities to other Canadians. At the moment, this aspect of DOC's Mission did not appear to be understood by Canadians or, perhaps, even by other public servants.

One speaker suggested that the solution to this problem might be a merging of the Departments of Communications and Multiculturalism. If the analysis of the mood of Canadians is correct, then **it will become increasingly difficult to justify two separate federal departments -- one concerned with "Canadian culture" and the other with "Canadian multicultural".** While such a merger would help to alleviate the sense of marginalization noted above, there was little discussion of how the active "sharing" part of the DOC Mission would then be operationalized.

### 4. Canadian Symbols

According to one definition which was used during the discussion of DOC's role, culture is a collective manner of thinking and acting. This "sociologic" definition of culture is driven by the values of a society and is fed by its symbols and myths. A question which preoccupied the workshop participants for a good part of the day was whether the Department of Communications had a role in constructing these unifying symbols and myths.

Two factors dominated the discussion. One was that **Canadians no longer seemed to be "buying into" national symbols such as bilingualism and multiculturalism.** The other was an **underlying skepticism as to whether myths and symbols could ever be imposed from above** and whether development of "official culture" was an activity that the Department should be engaged in.

Despite the sense that many traditional symbols of Canada no longer hold the same resonance for Canadians, there was some good news for the DOC portfolio in this regard.

According to the Spicer Commission, **the CBC continues to be viewed favourably by a majority of Canadians as a major contributor to interchange and understanding among the regions.** Many Canadians also believe that **a better understanding of our heritage would help contribute to unity.** This suggests that at least two departmental and portfolio activities are viewed by Canadians as important components of federal government nation-building.

The not-so-good news is that **no other aspects of the Communications portfolio are viewed as important national symbols.** One participant noted that the primary priority of most artists is to perfect their art form. In the course of this activity, they cannot avoid reflecting society and its myths in their art. However, most artists do not view this as their primary goal and, indeed, would deny that their art can be reduced to a mere vehicle for national symbols. Given this attitude, it appeared questionable that DOC would gain much support for cultural strategies that based their legitimacy on the promotion of Canadian symbols.

On the other hand, there appeared to be some merit in **enhancing the role of departmental and portfolio activities that support exchange and understanding among Canadians.** In the current climate of citizen discontent, it would appear to make more sense to help Canadians know themselves, rather than to tell them what they should know. In certain instances such a strategy might involve a heightening of DOC's and the portfolio's profile, rather than a lowering of emphasis on its activities. A focus on cultural "sharing" might be viewed by some as an important symbolic gesture in itself.

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### Conclusion

At the end of the day, it was evident that **Canadian renewal would probably require a continual re-examination of the orientation of DOC's policies and programs.** In the long run, as the Deputy Minister emphasized, the Department and the portfolio would have to adapt to certain new realities.

In a renewed Canada -- a Canada that is "coming of age" -- the Department will have to take into consideration a number of strategic factors:

- 1) Canadians want greater control over the public agenda and are becoming impatient with organizations that try to tell them what they should want or need;
- 2) Canadians are interested in justice and fairness, and they do not wish to see artificial distinctions made between "Canadian culture" and "multiculture";
- 3) the economic and social challenges posed by globalization will require a national response, but many of the means of meeting this challenge currently lie outside the power of the federal government;
- 4) The country is likely to undergo a fundamental realignment to accommodate these economic and social changes, but it is not yet clear on how this realignment will be accomplished;
- 5) The Department will be asked to play a role in helping Canadians share their values and ideas -- their culture -- but it must take care to ensure that it is not seen as attempting to impose values or symbols;
- 6) There is a large gap between Quebec and the rest of Canada with regard to political and institutional solutions, but a much narrower gap in terms of lifestyles and fundamental values.

It is clear that **both the communications and cultural parts of the Communications portfolio must put greater emphasis on activities that promote exchange and understanding across the country.** However, the means to achieve this objective are less obvious and **will require a profound examination by each responsibility centre to determine specific measures that can be taken within a given policy or program.**

This task will have to be **accomplished fairly quickly and within existing and constrained resources.** It may involve difficult choices but, as the workshop was told by the Deputy Minister, we must think about options for the portfolio or others will do it for us. We may be asked "to do less with less", but if that is the case, we should resolve to do it better.

Finally, it will be the quality of our ideas which will help determine the direction and outcome of Canadian renewal. **The Department will have to be innovative, flexible and, above all, responsive to the wishes of Canadians.** In the final analysis, it must seek to empower its client groups and those whom they serve -- individual Canadians.

## APPENDIX I

### **Workshop on Canadian Renewal: The Special Role of Communications and Culture**

**April 11, 1991  
Chapleau Room  
Palais des congrès, Hull**

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**EDA**

Boudreault, Pierre / EDA

**MINO**

Thompson, Terry Lynn / MINO

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## APPENDIX II

### **Workshop on Canadian Renewal: The Special Role of Communications and Culture**

**April 11, 1991  
Chapleau Room  
Palais des congrès, Hull**

9:00 a.m. **Chairperson's Opening Remarks - Eileen Sarkar**

9:15 a.m. **Deputy Minister's Remarks - Alain Gourd**

9:45 a.m. **A Perspective on Constitutional Reform in Canada - Martin Abrams, Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet on Canadian Unity, Federal-Provincial Relations Office**

The current re-examination of the Canadian federation is not the first such attempt to bring the Constitution in line with contemporary realities. It is important that we understand the evolution of the process so that we have a context in which to place current discussions. This presentation will provide the general background needed by the participants before they begin to focus on the role of communications and culture in a renewed Canada.

10:30 a.m. **Coffee Break**

11:00 a.m. **Consulting the Public - Lorna Higdon, Director of Policy and Evaluation, Citizen's Forum**

The federal government is currently engaged in extensive public consultations to get Canadians' ideas on a renewed Canada. What have they been saying about Canada in general? What have they been saying about culture and communications in particular? This presentation will focus on what Canadians say they need and want in a new Canada.

11:45 a.m. **The Mood of Canadians**

What are Canadian attitudes toward the current discussions on a renewed federation? This presentation will highlight polling data from Decima's "Unity Watch" surveys and CROP's 3SC analysis system for social change to provide participants with information on Canadians' views regarding the constitutional options now being proposed.

**Alain Giguère, CROP inc.**

12:30 p.m. **Lunch**

1:30 p.m. **The Mood of Canadians**

Dena Gollish Denham, Decima Research

2:30 p.m. **Coffee Break**

3:00 p.m. **Canadian Renewal - What Role Should Communications and Culture Play?**

Both communications and culture have in the past played key roles in creating a sense of Canadian nationhood. What role should they play in the future? What are the views of several respected opinion makers in the cultural and communications field? Do these suggestions appear reasonable in light of changing realities in Canada?

Chairperson: *Eileen Sarkar*

Panel Speakers

*Florian Sauvageau, Université Laval*  
*François Rocher, Carleton University*  
*Paul Audley, Paul Audley and Associates*  
*Michelle d'Auray, National Film Board*

4:45 p.m. **Chairperson's Closing Remarks - Eileen Sarkar**

2 April 1991

Canada