



Name of Publication

Nom de la publication

Date

Montreal Gazette

8

APR 30 1975

Culture versus sovereignty

The sooner the federal and provincial governments get off their "cultural sovereignty" kicks the better. The idea does not mean anything that has a place in a democracy.

Culture does not devolve from governments — how conceited can bureaucrats and politicians get? Culture is something that comes out of a person's head after something else has gone in. It is a process of absorption, selection, and synthesis, and it is impossible for a government to filter what goes in without distorting what comes out.

Sovereignty means ultimate power. Cultural sovereignty is just a fancy expression for thought control. Who needs it? The German government of the Thirties tried to exercise cultural sovereignty and gave Albert Einstein to America. The Soviet Union is still trying to exercise it today, and it has given Alexander Solzhenitsyn to Switzerland.

Wasteful process

Culture control is wasteful because it drives culture away. Of course Quebec is interested in preserving its heritage. Nevertheless, the moment it moves toward this goal through cultural sovereignty, culture will start heading for New York and Paris.

Under the banner of cultural sovereignty, the Canadian Radio and Television Commission is considering regulations that cable companies say will effectively cut out some U.S. border stations. Under the same banner, Quebec Communications Minister L'Allier attacks CBC plans to extend English-language services in the province.

The CBC's methods and plans may be readily criticized but surely not the principle of bringing programs to those who are interested in seeing and hearing them. Many Quebecers, like Canadians elsewhere, are interested in what goes on around them, and we can no more preserve them in cultural amber than we can educate them through ignorance. Too much of this sovereignty argument is reminiscent of those three celebrated monkeys on the temple at Nikko.

Government's role

None of this is to say that governments do not have a proper cultural role. More culture probably has been fostered by governments than by any other institutions or groups. But fostering an interest in Canadian or Quebec arts and sciences is quite a different thing from controlling them by limiting their input.

Nor is it to say that communication channels should not be controlled — someone obviously has to operate them. It is to say, however, that political interference should be minimal.

The Quebec cultural argument is essentially a separatist one. So is Canada's, in a way, but then Canada, perhaps unfortunately, is not part of any larger dominion. The provincial government cannot logically stand for both federalism and separatism. If Mr. Bourassa and Mr. L'Allier believe the implications of their argument, they should apply for PQ membership and clear the air.

Freedom to be creative, to be oneself within the bounds of social decency, this is the first thing to preserve in any culture.