

# *The Applebaum-Hébert Report: Introduction*

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The Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee was created in August 1980 to undertake public consultations for the purpose of reporting to the federal Minister of Communications and the House of Commons on the state of cultural policy and federal cultural programs. The review was the first comprehensive examination of Canadian federal cultural institutions and policy since the 1949-51 Massey-Lévesque Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences. The scope of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee included all sectors of heritage and culture, but its focus was to be on federal government programs and institutions. The results of the review were addressed primarily to the federal government who the committee concluded must “muster the political will to transform our cultural landscape when they have read the future in the will of those who elect them.”<sup>1</sup>

Two years and \$3.5 million later, the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee, popularly known as the Applebaum-Hébert Committee, presented its final report. In the spring and summer of 1981, the committee had toured Canada and received some 1300 briefs and submissions. Following from these submissions the committee published a synopsis of the briefs and hearings in order to provide a foundation for further analysis, leading to the committee’s findings and recommendations. The final report was completed in November 1982. It contained some 101 recommendations concerning government reorganization, the development of new federal government institutions and programs, and proposals for new or revised legislation. The report dealt with heritage, contemporary visual and applied arts, the performing arts, writing, publishing and reading, sound and film recording as well as broadcasting. The committee attempted to define the nature and role of the federal government’s cultural agencies and to provide findings on the character of their operations and the nature of their policy directions.

The completion of the Applebaum-Hébert Committee’s work represented the end of one stage in the development of federal cultural policy. Several subsequent stages have begun already with the analysis of the report’s recommendations by Department of Communications’ policy officers, Parliament, and the Cabinet. A Cabinet committee chaired by Senator Austin has started to examine the

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1 Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee, *Report* (Ottawa, 1982), p. 12.

recommendations in order to provide for Cabinet analysis. The House of Common's Standing Committee on Communications and Culture began in March 1983 to analyze the implications of the Applebaum-Hébert Committee recommendations and the potential costs required to implement them. While one might speculate that these subsequent stages of policy analysis should take several months, the effective implementation of the recommendations could take several years.

The publication of the report produced considerable media attention along with comment by professional heritage and cultural associations. Most of the media attention was directed at the recommendations for the reorganization of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the National Film Board, and the National Arts Centre. In some areas the findings have raised some concern about the source and quality of information used to prepare the recommendations. For example, the information used to form the recommendations about the National Film Board has been repudiated already by the film community and by some members of the Applebaum-Hébert Committee. The most serious flaw in the Applebaum-Hébert Committee's work was its inability to develop an analytical framework within which it could adjudicate the information that it collected. The committee endeavoured to analyze the rationale for, and the method of government intervention in, cultural activity in terms of cultural benefits, and culture as merit goods. It examined the modes of government intervention in terms of the federal government as patron, regulator, catalyst, and proprietor. However, the Applebaum-Hébert Committee could come to no final conclusions, preferring to recognize the "fact that no mechanisms exist for calculating the degree of intervention required or for identifying with any precision how it is applied. It presents a chronic difficulty: whose judgement and foresight is to be trusted?"<sup>2</sup>

The result of this inability to develop and apply some analytical framework is the Applebaum-Hébert Committee's failure to provide some detailed analysis leading to the formation of cultural priorities. In some areas the report presents a shopping list of cultural programs, grants, and new government structures all requiring government support and resources. In many areas the recommendations produce as many questions as answers. The most difficult aspect of policy development lies ahead in establishing priorities and making choices for the implementation of programs and structures. It means that considerable study must be undertaken by both the federal government and the heritage and cultural communities before a real impact on federal cultural policy can be attributed to the Applebaum-Hébert Committee.

In participating in this federal cultural policy review, Canadian archivists were struggling again for the recognition that archives form an integral, dynamic element within Canadian culture and heritage. It was the same struggle for recognition that the archives community had undertaken when presenting its positions on freedom of information and privacy legislation, on copyright, and for archives legislation. As with most studies of the arts and cultural sector, the Applebaum-Hébert Committee's emphasis was on the creative aspects of Canadian culture. Therefore, Canadian archivists confronted again the problem of justifying and explaining their

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2 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

role in supporting and servicing arts, culture, and heritage in front of a review committee whose focus, emphasis, and background came from publishing, the performing arts, broadcasting, and film. The task of educating these cultural review committees and commissions while seeking to present issues and concerns and advocate solutions placed Canadian archivists once more at a distinct disadvantage in the cultural policy formation process. The committee came to believe that the role of creative artists should be given special priority, although it recognized that “the stimulation of Canadian creativity will require that the knowledge base of culture and the arts be firm. Knowledge and information, and the means for their creation, storage and transmission are fundamental to culture and the arts.”<sup>3</sup> While Canadian archivists would readily identify with their contribution to the storage and transmission of knowledge and information, there must be real questions raised as to whether or not others recognize our important role. Canadian archivists’ past lobbying experience before political and governmental bodies would suggest that even the committee’s full acceptance of a national archival records commission signified only successful lobbying for a particular structure, and not a demonstration of any real understanding of archivists’ concerns and problems.

Canadian archives have already benefitted from previous government and private reviews of arts, culture and heritage. Ironically, these same reviews often ascribe the importance of archives to their area of investigation. The report of the 1949-51 Royal Commission on Arts, Letters and Sciences concluded that the “great importance to the nation of the proper preservation of all significant written records is perhaps not fully appreciated.”<sup>4</sup> In 1975 the Symons Report found that “without the resources of our many archives, original research on the development of our society, institutions or culture will be impossible. In the same manner, the more comprehensive the nation’s archival resources may become, the greater will be our opportunities for research into the nature of the Canadian historical experience.”<sup>5</sup> The Applebaum-Hébert Committee realized that “the libraries and archives of the country are important elements in our cultural life,” even though the term chosen by the committee in its *Summary of Hearings and Briefs* — “knowledge and information resources” — was found to be awkward.<sup>6</sup> However, this recognition of Canadian archives’ role in culture and heritage has never been enough by itself. These statements about the value and importance of archives have not translated into effective government action. Thirty years ago, the Massey-Lévesque Commission spoke of the same lack of suitable accommodation and staff at the Public Archives of Canada that was presented to the Applebaum-Hébert Committee. The Massey-Lévesque Commission suggested that new archives legislation was required to meet records management responsibilities. It also addressed the problem of professional training and institutional mandates, and suggested that the Public Archives “extend its services to the nation as a whole.” The commission proposed the creation of a Historical Manuscripts Commission to undertake national inventorying through cooperative institutional action. Finally, it recommended that

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3 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

4 Royal Commission on Arts, Letters and Sciences, *Report* (Ottawa, 1951), p. 122.

5 T.H.B. Symons, *To Know Ourselves: The Report of the Commission on Canadian Studies* (Ottawa, 1975), II, p. 69.

6 Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee, *Summary of Briefs and Hearings* (Ottawa, 1982), p. 47.

one remedy for the lack of proper public understanding and support of archival institutions lay in "mutual cooperation."<sup>7</sup> In the presentations before the Applebaum-Hébert Committee, Canadian archivists described their similar concerns about training, institutional mandates and legislation, and conservation, and proposed a national archival structure based on interinstitutional coordination and cooperation.

The comparison of similar concerns expressed by the Massey-Lévesque Commission and by archivists to the Applebaum-Hébert Committee does not suggest that Canadian archives have made no progress in the last thirty years. The last decade has witnessed an incredible expansion in the numbers of archival institutions. The problem for Canadian archives is one of qualitative development. The acceptance of a form of archival coordination by a federal cultural review committee some thirty years ago along with their identification of most of the problems which still concern archivists must demonstrate above all that simple recognition of our proposals by cultural review committees will not be enough to ensure effective implementation. The acceptance of our concerns and solutions by all levels of government will require ongoing, diligent advocacy. If that advocacy is to succeed, Canadian archivists will require considerable patience and devotion. Past experience with the results of federal cultural reviews indicates that archivists will again be masters of their own fate, and without choice. The following official and personal reactions to the Applebaum-Hébert Report commence the dialogue and debate which archivists must successfully resolve among themselves to make that fate a happy one.

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7 Royal Commission on Arts, Letters and Sciences, p. 122.