

THE GROWTH OF GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES SINCE CONFEDERATION

A STUDY PREPARED FOR THE
ROYAL COMMISSION ON DOMINION-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS

BY

J. A. CORRY

OTTAWA

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EDITORIAL FOREWORD

Professor J. A. Corry of the Department of Economics and Political Science at Queen's University was retained by the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations to prepare a review of the growth of government activities since Confederation, analyzing the causes and nature of the development, and indicating current trends.

The method of presentation and any expressions of opinion are solely the responsibility of the author, and not of the Commission.

Professor Corry's study substantiates and illuminates the following passage from the Order in Council which created the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations:

"...as a result of economic and social developments since 1867, the Dominion and the provincial governments have found it necessary in the public interest to accept responsibilities of a character, and to extend governmental services to a degree, not foreseen at the time of Confederation."

The author shows that the growth of government activities in Canada since 1867 paralleled a similar extension in all other industrial countries, but that it was much more than a mere imitation of political or social fashions elsewhere; - that it was a development bound to accompany the transformation of simple farm and woodland economies into the complex, integrated and interdependent industrial society of modern Canada.

Professor Corry argues that in many cases the enhancement of government activity and the corresponding increase in the cost of government were inevitable if the personal security, largely based on family solidarity, of the simple economy was to be preserved in the new environment, and if the potential benefits available from collective action in a closely-knit society were

to be realized. The conquest of man over nature and the obstacles of distance and topography, the conservation of natural resources, the protection of man, his crops and his flocks, against diseases and pests, the distribution of the costs of social and physical distress, the protection of persons against complex and subtle forms of dishonesty possible in an intricate commercial world, all cried for a variety of knowledge and informed action which the individual was no longer able to supply. As a result, the state has become an instrument of social adjustment and control.

In the beginning, each of these developments in government intervention was undertaken as an experiment in adjustment to meet changing economic and social conditions. Some of them may now be regarded as having passed the experimental stage and proved their social value. Others are experimental and controversial, subject to revision or rejection in the light of their operation.

The study opens with an introductory section which outlines the method of approach and notes some of the outstanding characteristics of government activities in Canada. It also explains the reasons for the attendant growth of a great number of ad hoc administrative boards exercising not only administrative functions but legislative and judicial functions as well. It then discusses the question of whether a system of administrative courts to control administrative discretion might be preferable. The following sections discuss the growth of government regulation of various business activities, and the expansion of government responsibilities in the fields of public health and social services.

This study was substantially completed in August 1938, although a certain amount of revision has since been done, and it is based on legislation and developments up to, but not beyond, that time.

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