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NEW TASKS AND NEW FORCES

OR

COULD TOMORROW'S RECRUITS REVOLT?

by

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The basis in national policy for the existence and employment of the Canadian Armed Forces is now being considerably changed. There is a great deal of thought about the immediate response to the changes, but not so much about the long term results, or about what should be done now to make sure that they are what we would now desire. This may seem academic to those who have to plan the immediate changes, for the long-term results will come after our careers are over. But they are not so far off as to be beyond our own lifetimes, and we may well be affected by the long-term results of what is done to the Forces now. Moreover, the changes now being made are such as may greatly affect recruitment of those juniors without whom even our immediate actions cannot continue. The effect on recruiting may well be not only quantitative but qualitative, for with different tasks a different type of volunteer may appear. It is therefore immediately pertinent to ask what sort of career a young man who joins can now expect, what sort of person is likely to be attracted by the prospect of this career, and what sort of person he is likely to become by the time he reaches senior rank. I do not pretend to know the answers to these questions, but I believe that if we do not think about them now we may eventually find the answers to be disquieting. To see how this may be so, I start with an outline of the reasons for change.

Armed Forces and Departments of National Defence exist in Canada as in most similar countries for little if anything other than war, for man-killing conflict between territorial states. War has always been plentiful, and preparation for it necessary. Now, quite suddenly, many responsible people are beginning to believe that war is becoming obsolete. Truly, there is still a great deal of armed conflict, but there is hope that because of the enormous increase in killing power which has been developed in the last thirty years, large scale world wide conflict will never again occur. And since Canada has no prospect of engaging in small war of the sort which continues,

many people find it reasonable to believe that for Canada, if not for other countries, war is obsolete, or at least obsolescent. If they were completely correct it would be reasonable to suggest that Canada should intelligently anticipate the future and abolish the Armed Forces immediately.

This is, unfortunately, at best a long-term view which oversimplifies the present reality. War may be unlikely or obsolescent, but it is not yet unthinkable, and positive action is needed to promote obsolescence. Somewhat paradoxically, an important part of this action is in international military preparation for the war which, we hope, will not happen, and Canada makes a military contribution to this preparation whose political importance as a token is much greater than its military importance. The importance of a token is by no means in proportion to its size, and the Canadian contribution is already reduced to near the minimum below which it would lose even its token importance. It can be expected to continue at its present size.

Apart from maintaining this minimum, there are two other reasons for not abolishing the Armed Forces immediately, and these reasons determine the changes now being made. About 80,000 servicemen and many more civilians in government, business and industry depend on National Defence. To make all these suddenly unemployed would be too great a shock to the national economy. This shock could be, and partly has been, avoided by gradual reduction, but some Forces remain. While they remain, there is a demand for them to do something more immediately visible and apparently productive than the support of the international political token force. The second reason is that there is a belief that the present Forces represent a capital investment in special skills which can be used for some of these immediately visible purposes, and that this capital investment should not be thrown away.

Two general types of non-military, but immediately visible tasks are proposed. One is to assist the government in emergencies, the other is to assist in miscellaneous, nominally fairly transient, jobs which no other government department is able to undertake immediately. Historically, there is nothing very new in this. Only since it has become unnecessary for every man to bear arms in his own personal defence has specialization in government created separate military and non-military departments. In recent Canadian history the North West Mounted Police was created as an essentially military

force, prepared for battle. The civil uses of the RCAF in surveying, and of the Army in opening telecommunications in the North West are well remembered. These tasks which no other government department could at the time undertake. So in some ways we may appear to be reverting to an older tradition in which the Armed Forces were immediately useful, but there is one major difference. Formerly, the Armed Forces prepared primarily for war, which was seen to be likely or at least possible, and did indeed come. Their non-military tasks were sidelines. Now, some of them will be heavily armed (by civil, if not, perhaps, by international standards) in preparation for a war which they will consider to be less and less likely, undergoing military training for an international game of bluff that is never likely to be called. Meanwhile the majority will be engaged on non-military tasks which inevitably will come to seem more and more important. This will be an entirely unprecedented situation, and we enquire first what part of the capital investment in the Armed Forces makes them suitable for these non-military tasks, how, in these new circumstances this investment can be maintained and improved, and what is likely to be the result of doing so.

Recently, use of the Armed Forces for non-military tasks has appeared to depend on their possession of equipment and on their availability. In emergency use as supplement to the police, to the fire brigade, and perhaps to other government agencies they have equipment which can be used for purposes for which it was not designed. Military air transport can move people and supplies, though not as comfortably or cheaply as civil transport. So can military ground transport and naval ships. Military engineers can construct and maintain roads, though rarely to civilian standards. They can set up emergency communication systems, which may not be compatible with the surrounding civil systems. Service men can fight forest fires and fill sand-bags to make dykes at least as well as civilian laborers, but they cost more. Individuals may often make impressively capable response to unfamiliar demands, but they cannot, on the average, do better than civilians who are exercising their own specialities. All the shortcomings are acceptable in the emergency use of forces who can arrive quickly. The Armed Forces can arrive quickly without disruption to other civil life, because they are not part of it and emergency action disrupts only their own training.

Much the same considerations hold good when the Armed Forces are used for miscellaneous tasks which no other department is able to undertake. They can be made available. If they do not have the equipment they can improvise, and costs are not so narrowly considered in what is intended as a transient programme as they would be in the more settled life of a department permanently engaged.

It is easy to foresee that increasing preoccupation with non-military tasks will lead to demands for equipment believed to be more suitable. These demands may be camouflaged with phrases such as "multi-purpose" but experience shows that multi-purpose equipment is always inferior to special purpose equipment for each purpose, and costs more. Inevitably, it will be the fighting quality which will suffer. Of course, since we suppose that the need for fighting will be reduced, this may not matter, but it will reinforce the opinion of the members of the Armed Forces that they no longer exist to fight, and this will affect a part of the capital investment in the Armed Forces which is more important than either equipment or availability.

The usability of the Armed Forces for non-military tasks depends on more than their equipment and their availability, on more than their non-involvement in civilian life. They are set apart essentially by the development of qualities best referred to as loyalty and discipline. Only these make them accept a style of living in which the possibility of disruption of their personal life is ever-present, in which sudden transference to unpleasant conditions is to be expected, and in which each man expects to be able to rely on the others to be acting for the common rather than the individual good. And they also result in the existence of a well understood and accepted system of command and control which can quickly determine and make known what this common good is. Without these qualities the Armed Forces would be very little set apart from the rest of the population, and despite their equipment their ability to undertake non-military tasks would reduce to that of everyone else.

They have this loyalty and discipline primarily because they are mainly preparing for war, for situations in which it is known that individuals die sooner and groups lose more quickly if these qualities are not present. If they come to believe that they are no longer mainly preparing for war, there

will no longer be these self-evident good reasons for loyalty and discipline. If we do not find some way of replacing them, transference of the Armed Forces from war to internal duties will remove the distinctive qualities which appear to make the transfer possible, and we will lose the capital investment which we are trying to preserve. But successfully finding new reasons for loyalty and discipline may raise new problems.

Loyalty and discipline both can, and do, exist outside the Armed Forces. Policemen and firemen get into dangerous circumstances where both are necessary and are developed. The enemy is not external in another state, but internal, and danger is to be combatted for the common good. One might well imagine the development of the Armed Forces as a general emergency force, at the call of the government, to do whatever is immediately needed for the common good against some internal natural or human enemy. No doubt a strong well-disciplined force with high morale could be built up for the purpose. This morale will be built on a confidence that there is a worthwhile task, and a consciousness of having performed well. But we must ask what could be the result? How could we control such a force?

In our system of government we cannot be sure that such a force could be controlled, because we have no recent experience of trying to do so. Not since Oliver Cromwell has an Army been allowed to be interested in the internal good of the country. For a century and a half after Cromwell a standing army could hardly be proposed. When one eventually became necessary it was rigidly kept to the minimum size needed to assure its preoccupation with the ever-present wars. Any discussion of politics, of the internal good of the country, was severely discouraged, certainly banned from the Officer's mess. In our system, those who control the heavy armament have by long tradition and deliberate training been made apolitical, whereas those who work for the common internal good are kept almost unarmed. We should not thoughtlessly let so important a principle of our communal life disappear.

We are so accustomed to our apolitical army that it may be difficult to imagine one that is not. Even in vocabulary we rarely think of a military state. If we are worried that the organized force of government may become too strong, we talk only of the police, of a "police state". Yet we know well from common experience in many other countries that when control of armament

is vested in the same men as those who have been trained into a disciplined mission to do good internally to the country, there may eventually come a time when they will decide that their own idea of good must prevail. And there is no-one to stop them. Could this happen in Canada?

Immediately, the answer is almost certainly no. Those at present in command have been so well trained to regard civil authority as preeminent, that a military take-over of power is unthinkable. But this can easily change. As the fighting role diminishes, emergency roles, helpful roles and useful roles will be more and more actively sought, in order to provide reasons to keep up the total force size. And once found, these roles may be progressively maintained, transformed from temporary activities for which only the Armed Forces were available, to activities which they maintain with the excuse that they have indeed become the experts. Gradually, as emergencies occur in many different places, the Armed Forces could build up a notable position of power. They would not do so now, but the future is determined by the type of recruit obtained now. The traditional appeal of the Armed Forces will continue to diminish, but the appeal to young men who wish to improve the lot of their fellow countrymen will increase. Here will indeed be an opportunity for such service. This will be a new type of recruit, for those who today most violently express dislike of the Service may be attracted. And among those who wish to do good will always come the devoted fanatics who will work for opportunities to impose good.

Military training may well provide just the opportunity for these fanatics. It will of course include the traditional importance of the legitimate civil authority, and the need for the Forces to remain outside politics, but the actual duties, involving internal and therefore political matters, may increasingly convince the young officer that this is no longer valid. He will, in the normal progression of his career, be shown just what is wrong in our society. At the same time, he will be taught leadership and will advance in control of a force in which loyalty and discipline must increasingly be stressed, because they alone hold the force together, but in which the loyalty may well become directed inwards to the force itself, to the force which, because of a continued small external commitment, controls all the heavy armament. So here is my answer to the questions with which I started. It is entirely possible that the shift in the tasks of the Armed

Forces may encourage the recruitment and development of young men who ardently desire to serve their country by improving it from inside. And if we do not worry about the training of these recruits now some may by the time they reach senior rank become the sort of person who will decide to impose his own view of improvement and will have the opportunity and ability to do so. I do not say this development is inevitable, I do say that ways should be sought now to forestall it.

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