

BOOKSHELF

The Money Givers: By Joseph C. Goulden

In his recent book entitled *The Money Givers* Joseph C. Goulden, a Washington journalist, comments somewhat cynically that "the tax lawyer can make a philanthropist of the meanest of men". In so saying he brings sharply into focus the whole question of the motivation of charity today. Does it spring from a true concern for others or for good causes or is it just one more mechanic for minimizing tax liability?

The major target of Mr. Goulden's rather scathing criticism is the private charitable foundation in the United States and the flagrant abuse by such bodies of their tax exempt status which the Tax Reform Act finally took from them in 1969. But anyone involved with private charitable foundations in Canada must be concerned that, whatever the initial motivation for their inception may have been, once created they enjoy in this country a privileged tax status which should carry with it some form of public accountability. We may feel, on reading Mr. Goulden's book, that the condition of private foundations in Canada cannot possibly be as bad as those portrayed by him in the United States. However, it seems likely that before too long the issue will have to be faced in Canada as to the degree of public disclosure and public accountability that is desirable in the case of private charitable foundations.

The book is written in a very racy and readable style and probably represents the ultimate in a "jaundiced" view of private philanthropy.



Foundations, Private Giving, and Public Policy:

The Commission on Foundations and Private Philanthropy

Because of its objectivity the Report and Recommendations of the Commission on Foundations and Private Philanthropy published in book form entitled *Foundations, Private Giving, and Public Policy* affords an interesting contrast to *The Money Givers*. The Commission was formed at the instigation of John D. Rockefeller III to make an in-depth study of the subject because of the spate of attacks by congressional leaders against philanthropic foundations in the United States. The Chairman of the Commission, which was an independent, non-government entity financed from non-foundation sources, was Peter G. Peterson, former Chairman of Bell & Howell Co. Mr. Peterson, in his preface to the Report, points out that the private foundations in the United States were totally oblivious of the warning signs of the troubles they faced through ignoring the obligation of public accountability probably because they assumed they were so well thought of by the community at large that they could dispense with the need for self-examination and disclosure to the public of the quality of their performance. He expresses the view that by remaining a kind of closed society in an era when openness had become a byword the foundations excited public suspicion and invited investigation.

The Report focuses on five pressing concerns which seem to be equally pressing in Canada namely the role of philanthropy in a changing society; the financial needs of charitable organizations and how they are best met; tax incentives and philanthropy; the need for public confidence; and the proper role of foundations vis-a-vis government.

Those concerned with the administration of charity and charitable foundations in Canada would be well advised to study this Report and ask themselves some of the basic questions the Commission posed for itself in terms of the role of private charity in the context of the welfare state.