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FRENCH-CANADA AND THE FUTURE OF CONFEDERATION

Speech by the Honourable Paul Martin, Secretary of State for External Affairs, to the Club Richelieu-Montréal, Montreal, December 7, 1967.

Canada and Quebec are now faced with a situation the seriousness - or I might even say the gravity - of which must not be underestimated.

Recent events have no doubt precipitated the development of the situation. The restlessness within Quebec, the Toronto conference, the Laurendeau-Dunton report - these factors have suddenly placed Confederation, as we know it today, in question, and more pressingly than ever before.

It is as yet too early to assess fully the effects on Canada's future of this sudden concentration of activity, but it is not too soon to see that it has accelerated matters, clarified the debate and created public interest in the problem throughout the entire country.

The situation in Quebec is, in fact, developing very rapidly; we, however, are meeting the question of unity, or, if you prefer, Canadian solidarity, with optimism, particularly since we are convinced that generally acceptable solutions are now in view. I hope that all Quebecers share this conviction with me.

The great debate on Canada's future in which we are now involved is one which Canadians of every province should follow with their hearts and minds, and one which provincial leaders should approach with a sense of great responsibility, for the attitudes and positions of all the governments of Canada will determine the country's future. This responsibility may be shared but no one has the right to refuse it. No part of Canada is free of the responsibility of contributing to the solution of the problem, just as no group will escape the consequences of failure arising out of their refusal of this responsibility.

I must point out, however, that the Federal Government, as the representative of all Canadians, is the rightful guardian of the integrity of Canada; this is a responsibility which is basic to its role and which it intends to carry out.