

Canada Weekly

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Prime Minister speaks on the problem of Quebec

The following excerpts are from an address by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to the Quebec Chamber of Commerce on January 28, 1977:

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...I would say that it is very good that we have to choose in a more definite manner our future as Quebecers and as Canadians. And that event, this election of the Parti Québécois, obliges us, invites us, enjoins us and will one day force us to do. I find this excellent. But they say, yes, yes, but what about the referendum? It's disturbing to have to think of this question, about the future, the very existence of our country. I would remind you that Ernest Renan, a philosopher who lived about a century ago, used to say that a nation is a referendum every day, a plebiscite every day. By that he meant that a nation cannot exist unless it wants to exist as a nation, unless it expresses itself as a nation, unless it acts as a nation. One of the parts of the definition of a nation...is a collective will to live, a sort of plebiscite. And before that, Rousseau spoke, of course, of a social contract, by virtue of which men and women in a society say 'we want to live together, under such and such conditions.'

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...What is not possible is to remain constantly in a state of indecision. Constantly in a state of flux. Constantly afraid to make choices. Because during that time, in the life of individuals, as in the life of peoples, others will make our choices for us. One might hope to protect one's freedom by not making a choice but others determine the conditions of our existence. We are right at this stage now.

The cards have been dealt, and they'll soon be played. If we Quebecers, we Canadians don't build this country in the way that we want, others will do it for us. Who owns Canada? It belongs to those who build it, who will make it, define it, who will express it. The same thing for Quebec. All that I want, and I think you want it ardently too, businessmen, businesswomen, you have decisions to take in

the economic sphere, in the world of finance, in the determination of your own lives and your investments, and basic choices. At some point we have to get out of this uncertainty....

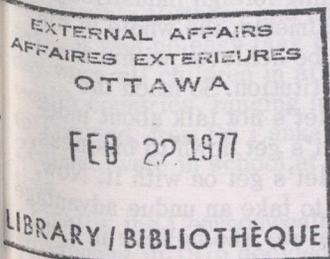
Jean Marchand said last night, in another gathering, that, I forget his exact words, but his idea was that there's nothing magical in the constitutional structure of a country. Perhaps he didn't realize it, but he was saying what Themistocles said 2,000 years ago in Greece. His strength was in being able to say to the Athenians who thought they were the most brilliant and happiest of peoples that "Greece is not eternal." In that sense, Canada isn't eternal. Quebec is not eternal either. But we would like to be sure for now. We are not talking about eternity, we are talking about the next ten or 20 years, of our generation, of yours. We have to have some certainty and that is why I say that the choice that we have to make, and it's marvellous that we have this choice, has to be a clear choice, it has to be made relatively soon, and it has to be final, definitive.

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Business dictates early decision

Now the party of Mr. Lévesque, the Premier of Quebec, is asking you the question: do you want Canada, yes or no? We also have to be able to make our choice relatively soon. I'm not saying tomorrow or even next year. But this means more for you in business than for those of us who are in politics, or who live a bit that way, improvising answers to questions from day to day. When we invest a thousand dollars, or a million dollars, we want to know at least about the rules of the game with certainty.

Even the uncertainty that has existed for the last ten years in this province probably has had negative effects on investment; probably affected unemployment....



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