

*The Address*

• (1540)

We only have ourselves to blame if overlapping federal and provincial activities prevent the creation of cohesive programs and generate an outrageous amount of waste in human and financial resources. That reveals a second reality as inescapable as the economic crisis, that certain inefficiencies are at the very heart of our system. These realities feed upon each other, and are a true reflection of the vicious circle which characterizes Canadian federalism. At the core of the economic crisis is a political crisis.

But for the better part of English Canada, there is no political crisis. Or, if there is one, they choose to ignore it. They have sent to Ottawa a new government with the mandate to better manage the present system without changing anything in it.

On the other hand, Quebecers not only sent a completely new team to Ottawa, but they gave their elected representatives the mandate to prepare a new order. The Bloc Quebecois was given a double mission: to manage the economic crisis and to handle the political crisis. Does the distribution of elected members in this House not prove the very existence of this second crisis? The government party only got 19 seats in Quebec, compared to 47 for the Bloc. Who do you think speaks for Quebec today?

[English]

More than 30 years ago Quebec awakened to the world and decided to catch up. The quiet revolution transformed Quebec. It did not take long before the spirit of reform in Quebec collided with the spirit of Canadian federalism in Ottawa. Thirty years ago the horns were locked. Thirty years later we are still at it, as if frozen in a time warp. We should learn from the past, and this we should have learned: The political problem with Canada is Quebec, and the problem of Quebec is Canada.

However, many Canadians refuse to acknowledge the problem which only serves to compound it. For example, the Bloc Quebecois has been on the federal scene for more than three years, but until recently we were ranked alongside the bizarre and the outer fringes.

Our aim of course is not to win popularity contests in English Canada, but we have here in a nugget the essence of the political predicament which bedevils Canada. A new political party which had led systematically in the polls in Quebec for three years was regularly dismissed as a quirk on the charts or a manifestation of a temporary leave of the senses. Hugh MacLennan's powerful novel *Two Solitudes* was published in 1945. Half a century later the title still mirrors the political landscape.

Some are willing to deny the obvious in order not to upset the status quo. They speak of one Canadian nation, whereas Quebec and English Canada are two different nations. Even when nobody in Quebec was contemplating sovereignty, the Canada that steered Quebecers was not of the same cloth as the Canada

that seized the minds and hearts of maritimers, Ontarians or westerners. Quebecers were in the vanguard of the struggle for more Canadian autonomy under the Red Ensign and eventually for the political independence of Canada. This tends to be forgotten in certain quarters where Quebec bashing is a popular pastime.

Canada and Quebec have both changed tremendously in the last 100 years, but they are travelling on parallel tracks and remain as different today as they were yesterday. By and large they both continue to ignore the history and the culture of the other. This is no accident; language, geography and history largely account for it.

However, Quebecers do not deny that English Canada constitutes a nation in its own right with its own sense of community. Every single poll in the last few years has shown that the vast majority of the people in each of the nine provinces want to remain politically united after Quebec becomes sovereign. This small detail is conveniently neglected by all those who question the existence of an English Canada on the shaky basis of regional differences.

In France the people of the north are certainly as different, if not more so, from the people of the south as maritimers are from the people of British Columbia. But they both feel a strong attachment to France, or to Canada.

• (1545)

In fact, by clinging to the one nation thesis, English Canada is running the risk of undermining itself. As Kenneth McRoberts, the political scientist from York University, wrote in 1991: "In its effort to deny Quebec's distinctiveness, English Canada has been led to deny its own".

If one accepts the obvious, one must surely accept the consequences. Every nation has the right to self-government, that is to decide its own policies and future. We have no quarrel with the concept of federalism when applied to unilingual states. It is a different matter when it comes to multinational states, particularly to the Canadian brand of federalism.

Canadian federalism means that the Government of Quebec is subordinate to the central government both in large and lesser matters. Within the federal regime, English Canada in fact has a veto on the future development of Quebec.

When the theme of national sovereignty is brought up in English Canada a nice paradox almost always emerges. As I will certainly refer to it in the coming months, I shall call it the paradox of English Canada. First, the tendency to consider passé the concept of national sovereignty, what with the European Community, GATT, NAFTA and so on. This is a patent misreading of the situation. Take a look at the western world. Ninety-five per cent of its population live in nation states.