

CANADA IN 1953

An address by the Prime Minister, Mr. St. Laurent, delivered to the Canadian Club and Empire Club of Toronto, March 9, 1953.

...You will recall that during the First World War there were strains between our two historic races occasioned by the war itself. By 1920 we were beginning to recover from those strains and people were talking about the development of a national spirit. When I spoke to the Empire Club in 1920, what I said on this topic went like this:

"A national spirit cannot attach to the soil alone; it must comprise the men who dwell upon it, the institutions which make them a body politic and also the private laws which crystallize their attitude towards each other and their methods of realizing human progress.

"These men are not, nor need they be, exact copies one of another; their social institutions do and they well may reflect the special characteristics of the various groups; so may their private laws and their local rules of individual behaviour, but if there is not a widespread feeling that in spite of such differences, perhaps even at times because of such differences, all these things are good to conserve, are worthy of mutual respect, constitute something for the whole nation and for each individual to take pride in and which enriches the national heritage, how can we have a national spirit?"

The development of a national spirit is obviously a theme that I find it hard to stay away from, because I returned to it when I spoke in Toronto to the Canadian Club thirty years later.

No doubt many of you will recall my saying on that occasion that I wanted to stress the importance of strengthening the institutions which gave richness and variety to the life of a free nation. And on that occasion, too, I reminded you that the historic partnership of two races and two cultures was the foundation of the only kind of national life we could expect to have in Canada.

As we look out on the world in this year 1953, we Canadians have, I believe, gone a long way since 1920 in developing a national spirit and we have more faith in ourselves and in our country than we have ever had before. And that faith is strengthened by many tangible expressions of the faith of other countries in us and in our place in the universal scheme of things.

That was not always true. There were times, in our earlier history, when faith did languish at home and when the confidence of others in Canada was very dim indeed.