



CANADA

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CANADA'S NEED - A NEW CONSENSUS

The following address was made by the Minister of Forestry, Mr. Maurice Sauvé, to the recent Thirty-fourth Couchiching Conference at Lake Couchiching, Ontario:

...We hear much talk these days of the necessity to amend or revise the Canadian constitution. This is a good sign, as it shows that people are taking seriously the current debate on the unity and the future of Canada. But although I share the widespread belief that changes will eventually be required in our constitution, it seems to me that, before we can agree on specific constitutional amendments, there are several fundamental questions that we and all Canadians ought to consider. Before we can have any meaningful discussion of formal changes in the constitution, we must agree on where we want our country to go.

COMMON PRINCIPLES BASIC

A written constitution is a very formal document, designed to give publicity and a certain permanent status to a set of principles, objectives and rules under which a society agrees to live. A constitution should reflect and sanction the mutually agreed purposes of a people. It should embody a consensus of public opinion previously arrived at. Without such agreement, a constitution is meaningless, and while general discussion of constitutional questions is beneficial, it would be illusory for us to attempt formal constitutional reform until a consensus is reached on what our basic objectives are.

I do not believe we have yet reached such a consensus in Canada. The consensus of 1867 no

longer prevails. It was based on another world, when Canada was to a large extent dependent on Great Britain and Great Britain was the strongest power in the world. This situation has changed, and the consensus that was founded on it has been eroded by the passage of time and the march of events - particularly the events of the last five years. The situation in 1965 is vastly different from that of 1865, when the foundations of our present constitution were laid. Today we live in a drastically altered world; we face new problems and we have new desires; we therefore need a new sense of purpose, and a new consensus on the kind of country we want Canada to be.

It is my conviction that we must seek this consensus in connection with three great questions in particular. Two of these questions arise from the existence in Canada of two major cultural and linguistic groups. The third relates to the pronounced regional differences in the economy of our country.

IDEA OF EQUAL PARTNERSHIP

The first question is the fundamental problem of the relationship between English-speaking Canadians and French-speaking Canadians. This is the basic issue, because it affects the vital interests of both groups. In French Canada it would appear that a consensus does exist on this question; it is that our relationship should be one of equal partnership. In English Canada, where there is naturally less awareness of this problem, I am not sure that a consensus exists. So the question is, do English-speaking Canadians agree with French-speaking

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