

and strength to their own country and to some degree reduced the demographic and territorial disproportion.

This, then, briefly sums up the conditions and developments that in 1867 led our two cultural communities and our four political entities to form the present Canadian Confederation. There is much to be said for this new political structure. In the first place, it provided the impetus that, in only one century, has led our country to become the sixth-greatest industrial power in the West. It has allowed Canada to extend its territory westward to the Pacific, eastward to Newfoundland, and north to the Magnetic Pole. The federal structure has enabled Canada to achieve independence by peaceful means and to become a land of freedom in which human rights are respected and equality of opportunity constantly promoted. It has also made us a prosperous nation. Though statistics are not everything, it might be noted that between 1967 and 1976 Canada experienced a growth-rate surpassed only by that of Japan, the gross national product rose by 53 per cent (compared to a 26 per cent increase in the United States) and real disposable income jumped by 74 per cent. Canadians in all provinces therefore enjoy a standard of living that is among the highest in the world.

However, federalism has clearly not resolved all our problems. Those that concern us today are certainly not new ones — they are the legacy of difficulties that already existed a century ago, at the time of the creation of our Confederation.

I shall begin with the gravest of our current problems: the presence in Quebec of a government that plans to put a new independent country on the map of the world in the near future. This danger is doubtless the most serious ever to be faced by the Canadian Confederation, in that it threatens the very existence of Canada as we know it today. No matter what plans for economic association the present government of Quebec proposes, the success of Quebec's efforts to attain sovereignty would certainly have significant economic and political consequences and radically change the balance of power in North America. How does one explain the emergence of such a proposal in this the second-largest of the provinces, after sharing for a century in the common life of the Confederation? Once again I shall have to restrict myself to a short outline of the reasons. Surely the main cause, which is at the root of all others, is to be found in the economic and language situation of the French-speaking Canadians, a situation that already existed in 1867. Cut off from its cultural origins, the French population of Canada turned inward after the British conquest — a readily-understandable defensive reflex. However, such a defensive position — made necessary by circumstance and the attitudes of the conqueror — did not favour the type of development necessary to any society. The French Canadians — restricted to agriculture and cut off, more or less intentionally, from the world of business, trade and industry — were poorly prepared for the industrial revolution when it suddenly invaded their existence towards the end of the last century. In addition to this startling change, there was also the fact of becoming a minority language group, as I mentioned earlier. In theory, after 1867 federalism should have enabled them to meet this double challenge. In reality, though Quebecers had the necessary political means, almost a century passed before they provided themselves with the kind of educational system and other instruments required for their economic and cultural advancement.

---