

One of the realities of Canada is that our diverse population is spread across an immense country. We are not Japan, where one culture is crowded into a small geography. Indeed, our country started with a deliberate partnership between two very different cultures - one speaking English, one speaking French. We have always been conscious of the special claims of the aboriginal people, who were here before the Europeans. We built our country - particularly this part of it - by inviting people from different parts of the world to come here and grow together in freedom.

That is why settlers from Germany and the Ukraine and all over Europe were brought here by the Sifton policies starting a century ago. That is why pockets of blacks moved to freedom in Canada, either on the underground railway, or in the small migrations to little communities like Wildwood. That is why Chinese began to move to Western Canada in 1858 and then again in the 1880s. That is why the Sikh community established itself in British Columbia in 1904. There is nothing new about the idea of drawing different cultures together in Canada. That is the way we became a country.

No one would pretend that the process was free of tension or prejudice. Mr. Diefenbaker was our first and only Prime Minister whose surname was neither the traditional English or French. And I remember him saying how much easier it would have been for him had he used his mother's surname, which was Bannerman, rather than his father's Diefenbaker.

Indeed, as a partisan Progressive Conservative, interested in the issues of my country, I remember that, before Mr. Diefenbaker won the election in 1957, the Canadian tradition did not allow women to serve in the Cabinet of Canada; the Canadian tradition did not allow Canadians of Ukrainian origin to serve in that Cabinet; Canadian law did not allow Canadian Indians to vote, let alone sit in Parliament.

That was thirty-three years ago - before Mr. Diefenbaker brought our tradition up-to-date by naming Ellen Fairclough and Michael Starr as Ministers, and by extending to the people we call our "first citizens" the most elemental right of citizenship - the vote. There was some grumbling about that, as there is with any change, but unquestionably Mr. Diefenbaker was acting in that spirit of generosity which has allowed us to become a large community, and not a small one.

This Canadian combination of cultural diversity and physical distance has created one of the basic policy questions in the country. How do we simultaneously achieve national unity and cultural and regional identity?

I want to speak a little about that today. I have two points to make. The first is that we know what won't work. It won't work to hunker down in our region or our language or our culture and shut out other Canadians. If that happens - in Alberta, or in Quebec, or in any of our communities - we will gradually disintegrate as a nation.