



Statements and Speeches

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CANADA IN THE NEWS

Speech to the Académie diplomatique internationale, Paris, on May 23, 1978, by Canada's Ambassador to France, His Excellency Gérard Pelletier.

I did not give my talk the title "Canada in the News" just for the sake of boasting. There are those who might at once object that Canada is not really the subject of conversation so very often, and that we hardly make headlines every day, every week — or even every month — in the international press. Even so, it is true that more attention has been paid to Canada for almost two years now, and there is a very specific reason for this — our national unity is being threatened. Until recently, no one outside the country and very few inside it doubted the stability of the Canadian Confederation, but that was before a nationalist party came into power in Quebec, the Canadian province that is predominantly French. This party itself does not speak for the majority of Quebecers since, because of the way our institutions work, though the party obtained a clear majority of the seats in the provincial legislature and formed the government, it did so with only 41 per cent of the popular vote. Moreover, this party did not get itself elected on a secessionist platform. On the contrary, the question of independence was put aside at the beginning of the election campaign that brought the party to power, to be reconsidered at a later date by means of an eventual referendum, which is supposed to resolve the issue some time next year. The Quebec government, therefore, has no mandate to lead the province out of Canada, though its expressed objective, which has always been included in the Parti Québécois program, is to make the province into an independent state. At best it would accept political sovereignty coupled with economic union with the rest of the country. The threat therefore exists — real enough, if not immediate — and it is because of this threat that there is now more talk about Canada, especially in Europe. It is no surprise, for instance, that the French press follows events in Canada with very special attention, in view of the part that the epicentre of the crisis is in Quebec — the largest French-speaking community outside France.

It is not customary for an ambassador to explain the domestic problems of his country to foreigners. However, I have two reasons for choosing to do so. In the first place, the Canadian Government refuses to bury its head in the sand or to evade the questions asked by its friends in other countries. Secondly, it is clear that the internal debate taking place in my country has some significance — indeed, even definite implications — for Europe. And so I should like, first of all, to summarize the Canadian situation and then to weigh the consequences of the outcome of this crisis for our European friends.

The Canadian situation — how can one summarize, without being guilty of caricature, a complex political situation resulting from a long chain of historical developments? The present crisis goes back to the very origins of Canada, which should perhaps be briefly considered here. First of all, we must recall that for a century and a half, from
