

Federal Government voices position on Quebec referendum

The following are excerpts from the text of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's speech delivered in the House of Commons at the beginning of the debate on the Speech from the Throne, April 15.

The feeling of being a Canadian, that individual feeling which we must cultivate, the feeling of being loyal to something which is bigger than the province or the city in which we happen to live, must be based on a protection of the basic rights of the citizen, of an access by that citizen to a fair share of the abundance of wealth in this country and to the richness and diversity of its laws. In that sense, the national interest must prevail over the regional interest, difficult as it is for some of us sometimes to set aside our feelings as citizens of this town or inhabitants of that province, because the provincial governments and other groups are there to speak for their interests. That is their duty and that is what they are elected for. But we are elected to speak for all of Canada, and if a person cannot feel that in any part of the country he or she will get a fair share, then they will transfer their loyalty from the whole to the particular part of the country in which they choose to live....

That concept of sharing can only be guaranteed, I repeat, if there is a national government which is prepared to state that the national interest must prevail in any situation of conflict over regional differences....

A nation is an everyday plebiscite and in that sense millions of Canadians have every day been expressing their support for Canada for more than a hundred years. They have spoken of their membership in this country which is based on sharing, on exchange, on brotherhood; through a form of plebiscite they have voted in favour of this country. And now, in the province of Quebec, we are living very historical times where Quebecers will have to answer the question put to them in the plebiscite or referendum....

I for one had hoped that even the Parti Québécois would show more sincerity and more courage in this historical moment. As far back as January 1977, I expressed the hope that the referendum question would be clear, that it would come soon and that it would be definitive, so that we could leave the issue aside for a generation at least. Unfortunately,

the referendum question was slow in coming, it has been about three-and-a-half years since the election of the Parti Québécois; it is not definitive since it is obvious in the very wording of the question that there will eventually be a second referendum, and it certainly is not clear since it is based on a deliberate ambiguity on the part of the Parti Québécois which knew full well that if it simply asked: "Do you, yes or no, want independence?" Quebecers would say no....

It is not the intention of the Government of Canada to go and wage the referendum battle. Quebecers in the House will be doing that, and I am sure they will do so well and convincingly. As a government, I believe we have to explain to Quebecers who will be called upon to vote "yes" or "no" what our attitude will be as the Government of Canada in the event of a "yes" as well as a "no"....

It is very obvious in the comments made by all...premiers that they have no sympathy for a government bent on destroying the nation and that if they were to associate they would certainly not associate with an independent state that had caused the breaking up of our country....

Provinces say "no"

Imagine the feelings of the provincial first ministers who have no economic or cultural interest in negotiating association and who have absolutely no reason to agree to association. By asking this question, the Péquiste government has given them every reason to say "no". By saying "no", not only are these provinces acting in their interest, but they are also ensuring that Quebec will not achieve sovereignty since, once again, we have been assured that one will not come about without the other....

Quebec is part of a federation which is itself an association. This federation can be changed and improved, but it is not an association of the common market type which the Canadian Government could negotiate with the Quebec government since, in our view, Quebec is not an independent country....

Those who will be casting a "yes" vote to the referendum should know at the outset they are proceeding into a dead end. They must know at the outset that a "yes" vote can only lead to a political and legal impasse, because as I have

shown, there can be no association without partners, of which there is none. And independence cannot be achieved without association, which is why it will not be achieved....

Before building a house to meet the needs of a family, it must be first decided that family life is wanted. Now, as we know, the ultimate goal of the PQ ideology is to sever Quebec from Canada; we cannot then bank on them to hold very productive negotiations in the field of new federalism. So, I repeat, even a "no" vote may not necessarily lead to the renewed federalism everyone wants. There is doubtless one way of ensuring it, and that is a massive "no", a "no" that rings so loud and clear that the PQ government would understand that Quebecers truly do not want to separate from Canada, and that they had better buckle down to the task of renewing federalism instead of destroying it....

What is important at this stage of our political life is to put an end to the uncertainty that Quebec has been in since the PQ party was elected in November 1976. Once again, that is why the only chance that we can have of obtaining that would be a massive "no" vote on the referendum. I am not prophesying any result on the referendum; I am only analyzing what the attitude of the Federal Government will be and must be. I do feel that at this time in the life of Canada it is important, if we are going to build bridges between every part of Canada, that we get rid of that doubt. And I repeat, that doubt is not only expressed by the separatists in Quebec, but also by what is hopefully still a small minority across the land who have been closing doors or burning bridges and protecting their particular interest over and above the national interest....

In conclusion, I think we all must realize that our economic problems, the questions we must solve in foreign affairs, the challenges we meet in the development of this country in every way, in the exchange of cultures, can only be discussed fruitfully in the context of a strong Canada. And Canada must be strong not only militarily, though that is important, and not only economically, though that is vital, but Canada must be strong in the hearts of its people. Canada must be strong more than in its institutions; it must be strong in the kind of adherence that each individual citizen makes to the common good, to the national will....