

Statement

Secretary of
State for
External Affairs



Déclaration

Secrétaire
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Affaires
extérieures

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

NOTES FOR A SPEECH

BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,

AT A LUNCHEON HOSTED BY

L'ASSOCIATION DES JURISTES

D'EXPRESSION FRANÇAISE DE L'ONTARIO

TORONTO, ONTARIO

October 29, 1990.

Canada has just gone through an extraordinary summer, characterized by such exceptional events as the failure of the Meech Lake Accord and the Oka crisis. And the fall has already given us the childish antics of the Senate. All this has helped to aggravate the cynicism of Canadians toward their political institutions.

But if you think our summer was of the unstable variety, think for a moment about what has happened in the Soviet Union, India, South Africa and even Japan, that modern symbol of stability, which is seeing its economy affected increasingly by the demands of its own consumers, which is considering changing its legislation to allow more active participation in peacekeeping operations, and which is compelling what has been an inward-looking society to come out of its shell and open up to the rest of the world.

Thus we are living in a period of profound change worldwide. More than any other, we are truly a country of the world, attached as we are by family and trading ties, and by a profound interest in having a world order that works well.

We are not immune to the need for self-examination or to change. Nor should we be afraid of these things.

My observations today are personal, as one Canadian to others. And I have three points to make.

The first is that Canadians are the most fortunate people on this earth. Other nations envy what we take for granted, and they are frankly puzzled that we do not appear to place more value on our extraordinary country. Paul Desmarais said it well when he expressed the wish that Canadians would show the same respect for Canada that foreigners do.

My second point is that there is nothing guaranteed about Canada's good fortune. The wealth we inherited can be wasted. The traditions of tolerance and compromise, which are at the heart of this country, can be crowded out, or shouted down. We have to work to keep our good fortune, or we will lose it.

And third -- and most important -- we cannot afford illusions. We have to see Canada as it is today, and consider, openly and honestly, what we want Canada to be tomorrow.

All of us have to be prepared to examine our assumptions, and to change both our practices and, when necessary, our institutions.

Mr. Gorbachev makes a useful distinction between "new thinking" and "old thinking" and his experience provides a striking example of how difficult a change that is. So will it be difficult in Canada. But there is no refuge in old formulas. If super-annuated celebrities want to revive Cité Libre, let them indulge their nostalgia.

Let no one pretend that is an answer for contemporary Canada, much less for the future of a country which is profoundly different from what it was.

In the past we concerned ourselves with three main questions: in English Canada, it was how we would define our own culture while living alongside a people which for all practical purposes spoke the same language as us, but whose means very often surpassed ours; in French Canada, it was the survival and development of the French culture; and in Canada as a whole, it was the challenge of encouraging two great cultural traditions -- the English and French -- to live and to flourish together within a single state.

The challenge today is broader.

There is of course an urgent need to make Quebecers comfortable in the whole of Canada. But this debate has also changed. It has broadened. Discontentment with Canada now extends far beyond the boundaries of Quebec. It certainly exists in the West, and has for some time. But it is more than a regional phenomenon. There is a feeling that many of our institutions are not up-to-date. Certainly we must reexamine, fundamentally, the approach we have taken to Canada's original people. And there are other issues where it is urgent for Canadians to reexamine our assumptions, our goals, our institutions.

Premier Bourassa asked the right question after the failure of Meech Lake, when he said: The question used to be, What does Quebec want? Today, the question is: What does Canada want?

This is an excellent question -- no less relevant in Toronto than in High River, in Halifax or in Quebec City.

The simple acts of posing and answering that question would be very good for Canada. For one thing, it would teach us a lot about one another. This country is still unknown to most of its citizens -- too few Albertans have contacts with Quebecers; too few Quebecers with Albertans; too few Torontonians understand why the culture and history of western Canada are different from those of the western United States; too few Canadians anywhere have a clear sense of Canada's history. I believe a process which encourages Canadians to come together, to talk about our future together, would help create that unity we discuss so much. But beyond that, it is time for Canadians, together, to look at the wider world, and ask how we want to respond to profound changes that are transforming our planet, and our lives.

We know about the changes. The Berlin Wall is down.

There is a hole in the ozone layer.

Babies can be conceived in test-tubes.

Asia is an economic powerhouse.

More nations become more competitive with Canada.

National sovereignty, as we defined it traditionally, gives way every day to larger institutions of international order.

Terrible human tragedies persist - children without food; refugees without countries; zealots turning to hatred and terror.

This is not the world of 1867 when MacDonalld and Cartier had the genius to create our extraordinary confederation. This is not 1905 when the rest of the country had the good sense to let Alberta and Saskatchewan become provinces. It is not 1960 when the Quiet Revolution was born. It is a new world, to which every nation must respond.

And to no nation does that offer more promise than it does to Canada.

Look at what we have done. In a world torn by ethnic confrontation, we have created a tradition of diversity which unites, in a peaceful community, people from every culture and colour and corner of the world. We have built a modern, successful economy. We have very high standards of social justice, and seek to improve them. We are far from perfect, but Canada is, already, what other countries want to be; and we have an extraordinary opportunity to shape the modern world.

But first, we have to want to act as one country at home. That cannot be achieved by an Act of Parliament: it requires an act of will, by the broad community of Canadians. We have to decide whether there is an abiding value to this country; whether our good fortune is worth working for and, if so, how.

Tomorrow is the eighteenth anniversary of my election to Parliament. I have been privileged to work in three of Canada's major political institutions -- a national party, Parliament, and the Government. None of these institutions works as well as it needs to. All must be prepared to reexamine old assumptions, and make real changes. So must other Canadian institutions -- business, unions, the media, the professions, certainly the interest groups.

The question for all of us is: What does Canada want?

The question for each of us is: What are we prepared to do to achieve those Canadian goals?

This can be a very exciting time in Canada, a time in which we both renew our sense of our nation, and begin to shape the historic changes in the world.