



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 52/32

CANADA IN THE COMMUNITY OF NATIONS

An address by the Prime Minister, Mr. L.S. St. Laurent delivered at the Diamond Jubilee of the Association of Canadian Clubs, at Hamilton Ontario, September 12, 1952.

Mr. St. Laurent opened his address with a tribute to the Canadian Clubs on the occasion of their Diamond Jubilee. He closed his introduction by saying that "the Association of Canadian Clubs is, to my mind, most representative of things Canadian, and any institution which today fairly represents Canada cannot help but be young, vigorous and bold". The text of the speech from this point follows:

.....I think of Canada as a budding adult with the key to the front door of the century in her hand.

The fact that Canada has reached the age of majority among the family of nations is now of course universally recognized. But that recognition had to be won and the fact that it has been won was due, in no small part, to our unwavering insistence, during our national adolescence, that, in addition to controlling our domestic affairs as we have done for a hundred years, the Canadian people were capable of making their own decisions in their relations with other nations. The evolution of a nation among the nations, begun by Sir Wilfrid Laurier and continued by Sir Robert Borden and Mr. Mackenzie King, has now reached its completion and Canada has all the characteristics of an adult nation, without external limitations on the management of both its domestic and its foreign affairs.

It should be a matter of pride for us that we have been able to reach adult status. Certainly at the time of the birth of our nation, and for many years afterwards, there were many grave threats to our growth. Confederation itself was far from being the unanimous wish of the Canadians of 1867. Many accepted the union with reluctance and some of the earlier generations were never reconciled to the new federation. By 1871 the territorial limits of Canada included over one half of a continent but that vast territory was in the control of a handful of people concentrated on the fringes

of the four original provinces, while to our south lay a virile, populated nation that had already achieved a goodly proportion of its manifest destiny and showed manifest signs of being capable of achieving much more.

Not only were the links between Nova Scotia and British Columbia very tenuous, but the confederation was only a few years old when it was plunged into an economic depression which lasted almost unrelieved for 20 years. These hard times resulted partly from external causes and partly from the accumulation of huge debts necessary to finance the vital rail link with British Columbia.....

As a Diamond Jubilee is an occasion for looking backwards, it is appropriate to look for some of the reasons for our survival as a nation. These reasons should help us to understand why we now have that key in our hands.

One of the reasons for our survival lies beyond the borders of Canada. It has been the attitude of our southern neighbour towards our development. The strong sense of destiny that developed in the United States after it had broken through the Appalachian barriers of the eastern seaboard produced a physical development that was without parallel in history. Yet, in spite of the fears of the Fathers of Confederation, the surge of nationalism that accompanied the swift westward progress of the Americans was of a different nature from those other brands of nationalism that have been responsible for so much strife and destruction elsewhere.

With the exception of a few boundary disputes which were settled without a struggle - though not always to Canadian liking - and a few occasions of vocal violence, American nationalism was a force that recognized and respected the territorial rights of the numerically weaker northern neighbour. Though the Americans have never entirely understood the more amiable arrangement by which we Canadians gained the right of self-government from London, they have sensed and respected our firm resolve to be ourselves. American nationalism has been tempered by the continuous interchange of peoples that has taken place between Canada and the United States since the end of the War of Independence, and is still taking place today to the advantage of both of our nations.

Economic factors have also contributed to our national growth. Only one year before Confederation, the reciprocal trade arrangement that had existed with the United States and had been so beneficial to the British North American provinces was ended.

With the loss of vital markets resulting from the termination of the Reciprocity Treaty, the prospects of Canada following an independent economic course seemed to many very gloomy indeed. Indeed a few pessimists saw annexation to the United States as the only cure to the hardship that was sure to follow.

Fortunately the optimists far outnumbered the pessimists and the response to the challenge was a search for other markets and the establishment of new Canadian industries. The going was hard at first, and discouragements were many, but the efforts have been well rewarded.

We have only to look about us in this city to see what sort of accomplishments have been made in industry, and it is common knowledge that Canada is the fourth greatest

trading nation of the world today. These two achievements, the fruit of adventure and enterprise, have given all Canadians a common feeling of accomplishment and pride, and have played a part in the creation of a Canadian consciousness.

You in Hamilton have long prided yourselves on living in the industrial heart of Canada, and the growth of this city and region have been simply prodigious. But there are new communities in every part of Canada following close on the heels of your achievements here.

Early this year I visited the great rival steel centre of Sault Ste. Marie. Less than a month ago I saw, at Arvida, in the Saguenay region, the greatest single hydro-electric power plant in the world and the greatest aluminum refinery in the Commonwealth. More recently I have seen the greatest smelter in the Commonwealth at Trail, the huge sawmills of Vancouver Island, the tremendous paper-mill at Powell River, and the sites of even vaster undertakings in Northern British Columbia and Alberta. I passed across the Prairies as the farmers harvested the greatest wheat crop yet.

I have seen so much that I feel we can almost overtake our American neighbours with our superlatives.

But other less material factors have helped to make Canada a separate nation. It is a commonplace on such occasions to say we are one nation with two cultures. That is true. But it is also true that both original racial groups in Canada have shared alike in their European and Christian heritage.

This common appreciation of the good in European traditions and institutions has made a contribution to our evolution to nationhood. Unique among the nations of America, we did not violently sever our ties with Europe but have continued to look to that continent as a source of enrichment for our own way of life. This no doubt explains why, of all people of the Western hemisphere, Canadians seem best able to understand Europe and why, I think, they are better understood by Europeans. We have appreciated Europe's gifts and we have used those gifts in developing our own culture.

No summary of the factors that have bound us together as a nation would be complete without a reference to our membership in the Commonwealth of Nations. We Canadians have taken pride in the growth of that association of free and independent nations and in the contributions that we have made to its evolution. We see in the Commonwealth an instrument of co-operation for the common good in both peace and war, but at the same time an instrument which does not bind its members rigidly by specific commitments or formal terms. The Commonwealth is not a power bloc, but is an arrangement which permits its members to participate fully in the task of building an effective international organization on a wider scale. When problems do arise that can be solved by co-operation and understanding, Canada has always been ready to assist in solving them, as we did at Colombo in 1950, when the Colombo Plan was established. We intend to try to the best of our ability, at the Commonwealth Economic Conference to be held in London in November, to foster helpful co-operation within and beyond the Commonwealth.

The sentiments which Canadians feel for this great institution in whose evolution they have played a leading role have been a unifying factor in our national life.

It would seem almost too obvious to mention that the Crown has made a strong contribution to the development of Canadian unity. But if I were to omit a reference to the Crown I would be neglecting an important force in Canada's growth to adult nationhood. We Canadians have a sense of national loyalty, but because we are of different racial origins and have different cultural backgrounds, and because our centres of population are scattered we also have strong local loyalties.

The interesting and sometimes disconcerting variety we find in provincial politics I think bears this out.

This rich diversity of local loyalties is blended together in a common loyalty to the Crown, a loyalty which was dramatically and enthusiastically demonstrated by the reception given to our Royal visitors a year ago by Canadian citizens of all provinces and of all ethnic origins.

Sometimes I feel that our American friends envy the symbol of unity that we have in the Crown, for whenever Canada is honoured with a Royal visit they feel entitled to snare in it as sort of ex officio members of the Commonwealth. Such a thought, of course, if carried too far, would be dangerous and I don't want to be placed in the embarrassing position of having offered the United States an opportunity to come into Confederation so that they too might directly enjoy the advantages of constitutional monarchy - or even of a dollar stronger than their own.

While all these factors have been important ones in our development into full nationhood, one of the most important of all, and what does most to make the Canadian nation different from others, is the bilingual and bi-cultural partnership in this nation of ours. If that partnership had not been cemented by the sincere efforts of the great majority of Canadians to achieve mutual understanding and by their willingness to co-operate in solving the major problems that have faced our country, then, we could scarcely apply the term "adult" to our nation.

The men who founded our nation did so on one principle that stands out above all others, the principle that the new nation should enable the English-speaking and French-speaking partners to keep their essential characteristics, their religion, their language, their culture. This they saw as the keystone of our national unity.....

The example set by the Canadian Clubs in 1892 in fostering better relations between the two members of our national partnership have had so many imitators whose efforts to obtain greater unity have been successful that it can now be truthfully said that Canada merits that definition of a nation given in St. Augustine's "The City of God" - "A nation is an association of reasonable beings united in a peaceful sharing of the things they cherish....."

I said earlier that I believe that Laurier's famous prophecy is on the verge of being fulfilled, that Canada stands with the key to the front door of the century in her hand. And I have spent several minutes in describing the processes and elements that have been used in the forging of that key.

On the other side of that door lie riches so fabulous and varied that it taxes the imagination to describe them. Even the abundant heritage that Providence has been pleased to bless us with to date is but a pale shadow of the treasures that can be ours.

This promise of better things to come brings with it great responsibilities, and, if we are to become the great nation as now appears to be our destiny, we have to accept those responsibilities.

One of the responsibilities that our wealth will put upon us will be to use our resources to the greater good of not only Canadians but of all mankind.

We must, I think, see that all Canadians share in the material advancements of the future by the establishment, with the co-operation of all of the existing agencies, of as comprehensive a system of social justice as it is in our power to provide.

The new riches which appear just across the threshold should not so dazzle us that we forget the Biblical maxim that "To whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required".

We must not become so satisfied with our own good fortune that we forget that there are many millions of people living in the world today who are scarcely able to find enough scraps to keep alive..... Our people have demanded of their government that something be done to alleviate the suffering of the starving masses of the world and have supported, with almost unanimous approval, Canada's participation in the rehabilitation programmes of the various United Nations agencies and the Colombo Plan. They have regretted that it has not been possible to accomplish still more in these international humanitarian projects because it has been necessary, in association with other free peoples, to spend so much for our own national security and for theirs.

I hope and I believe that once the measures for our own safety and the safety of all freedom loving peoples with which our own is bound up, have been reasonably secured from the formidable threat that still shows no signs of diminishing, Canadians will want to participate to a greater degree than they can today in helping their less fortunate fellow human beings to improve their lot in life.

The realists among us, and I think that most Canadians are realists, know that during the present period of international tension we have no choice but to strengthen our defences, although I believe all of us would much rather live in a world where no tax money at all had to go into armaments. I am convinced our people realize that if the free world fails to provide for its own protection, even though we have to delay the many projects we would like to carry out in the interests of international human welfare, it will be committing a great crime.

Not only would we be depriving the enslaved world of all hope, but in the long run it would be dooming huge areas to perpetual starvation.

Once we are satisfied that the threat to the free nations of the world who bear with them the hopes of all humanity has sufficiently diminished, then we can turn to those constructive projects we would much rather be carrying out now.

We all hope that that happy time will come soon. When it does come let us go about our task without an attitude of condescension. - I think another word for it is "Olympian detachment" - but in a spirit of equality and of co-operation.

If it is the choice of our people to assume this responsibility, let us do so with a wholesome spirit. Let us look upon our task as one of helping others to help themselves.

Let us realize that we are not expected to be perpetual donors of food or to be permanent subsidizers, and that what is wanted from us is the sharing of our technical "know-how" and our aid in the form of capital goods so that dams may be built, new areas irrigated, new techniques employed to enable the underdeveloped areas to be developed and the underfed peoples to feed themselves.

Our destiny requires more of us than ensuring greater social justice and maintaining freedom and opportunity at home and assisting those less fortunate than ourselves throughout the world, however worthy and necessary those things are. If this century is to be ours, we must show the disillusioned and those without hope that our kind of society is a worthwhile one; that we ourselves are, on the whole, fairly decent people interested in the welfare of our neighbours. For all the members of the human race are really neighbours in this modern age.

We will not triumph in the struggle against Communism by arms and production alone, essential though they are. Communism has flourished because of poverty and despair but it has also become the home of the frustrated and of many confused souls who could not fulfil their own natural destiny or had no roots in a democratic society.

We will rid the world of this modern menace only if we really practice what we preach. That means we have to tolerate those with whom we honestly differ. It means we must allow creativeness and we must preserve freedom for others to say and believe what they will. It means ordinary men and women must have a chance to live their own lives in their own way and bring up their children decently, and enjoy the fellowship of their neighbours. The happier and more prosperous the ordinary human being is the less likely there are to be unpleasant dictators ordering us about. All this requires a recognition of the fact that we are all, regardless of the colour of our skin, or of the language we speak, or the country we belong to, pretty much the same kind of people-- though strange we may sometimes appear to each other to be. You remember the appraisal of the dear old Quaker: "All the world art strange, but thee and me, Priscilla, and thou art strange at times." But that kind of strangeness need not keep us apart any more than it did Priscilla and her Quaker husband.

If we Canadians can try to have this kind of attitude such an example may perhaps be our noblest contribution to the welfare of mankind.

If we Canadians accept the responsibilities that our new wealth is placing upon us, by employing it for these unselfish ends then we will prove worthy custodians of the key that has been placed in our hands.....