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SECOND COMMONWEALTH STUDY CONFERENCE

Text of an address prepared for delivery by Right Honourable  
Vincent Massey, C.H., Chairman (former Governor General of Canada) to  
the 300 Members of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh's Second Commonwealth Study  
Conference, at the University of Montreal, on May 15, 1962.

Your Royal Highness, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First may I echo the warm welcome which the members of the conference  
received yesterday from our President.

I shall try this morning to give you a brief introduction to the country  
in which you will be living for the next few weeks, and tell you something of the  
land which is to be the scene of your studies.

Those of you who are coming to Canada for the first time will find that  
we possess a complicated national pattern. We Canadians give much thought to  
this. In few countries are the citizens so much concerned with the understanding  
of themselves; this is, I think, a healthy exercise. If you find it difficult to get

a clear picture of the land you are visiting, you can be comforted by the fact that you may perhaps share certain perplexities with its own inhabitants!

Nous nous reunissons aujourd'hui dans une des plus grandes villes du monde, ou l'on parle francais. Permettez moi, en employant une de nos deux langues nationales, de souhaiter, aux membres de cette conference, qui parlent francais, un accueil cordial et sincere.

To those of you who do not know this country, and I take it that means most of you, I would not venture to suggest precisely what you may expect to see. I would, however, hazard two guesses.

My first guess is that you will find the primary problems that Canadians face in today's society to be much more familiar, far closer to your own experience, than you may have thought possible. The communities of the Commonwealth are feeling the impact of industrialization at a pace not even dreamed of a generation ago, let alone in the distant era of the first industrial revolution. We are all of us living in what has been called the scientific revolution. Ours is a world of instantaneous communications, swift travel and easy transport of materials, of an industrial chemistry that will soon be able to make almost anything out of anything else. It is a world of automation, of electronics and atomic energy, with the need for highly skilled and intelligent workers. It is also a world whose population grows by millions every month. High pressure is thus brought to bear on the most precious elements -- land, water and air -- the supply of which is not unlimited even in Canada.

In spite of the many social and political differences among us, and the various approaches to industrialization in our countries, we have each of us

far more in common with one another, than with our grandfathers and with the World of 1914 or even 1939. Science and technology are universal languages, and we are all moving in the same direction. What you will see, then, of the conditions and the problems faced by a new mine manager in the wilderness of northern Quebec, or by a self-employed farmer on the prairies, or by a semi-skilled labourer in an old urban industry adopting automation, will not be so very unfamiliar to you. These conditions and problems will, indeed, have a great deal in common with those met by a hydro engineer in Pakistan or a cocoa planter from Ghana or a trade union organizer from Kuala Lumpur. In this field, therefore -- the one with which this Conference is primarily concerned -- you will find in Canada much that is surprisingly familiar. You will discover the sad mistakes we have sometimes made, and you will understand what we have been able to achieve in the battle against those new industrial forces which, if we let them, can dehumanize men and rob them of their dignity. Thus by looking at Canada, you will also be discovering and understanding your problems as well; and you may perhaps leave here somewhat better prepared to comprehend and benefit from the things that industrialization is doing for human beings in other lands.

I would hazard another guess about your expectations.

Canada has been fortunate in having many friends. Indeed we possess no traditional enemies; we have never had colonies and have evolved from colonial status ourselves; we are not charged with the great responsibilities of defence and power; we represent an alternative North American pathway

to industrial prosperity; we can be said to be a different kind of American nation. We have sometimes won from other peoples a vague feeling of good will, or even admiration, which is not always hard-earned or fully-deserved.

I think you may well find in this country much that will puzzle and surprise you, or which may lead you to jump to false conclusions. There are things -- perhaps not particularly striking or sensational -- which are peculiarly Canadian. They require some effort to know. And they must be taken into account, if a misunderstanding of this country is to be avoided and hence in part a misunderstanding of the deeper problems with which we are all concerned at this Conference. So if those of you who know Canada well will bear with me, I shall try to point out what I think are certain essential and peculiar features of our Canadian society. I do so not by way of excuse -- in the sense that to understand all is to pardon all -- nor on the other hand shall I try to list our shortcomings by way of penance. I do so, rather, in order that you may see a little more objectively the community in which you will be living for the next few weeks.

In the first place, Canada is a northern country. It is the largest nation in the world whose economic and social rhythms are guided by a northern geography. This is such an obvious fact that it is often discounted. It cannot be ignored. The effect of temperatures below the freezing point, and often subzero, for many long months of the year has had a crucial effect on the sort of buildings and roads we must create, the kinds and amounts of food we must grow and consume, on our clothing and other necessities, and ultimately, on the sort of people we are. To give some rather trivial but perhaps telling examples, I doubt if there is any large metropolis in the world

Unlike the nation to our south with its richer soil and milder climate except possible Moscow, that faces an annual problem of snow removal we have not been able to occupy our vast territories. We have proved as serious as that of Montreal.

Our steel plants must often dynamite their frozen piles of iron ore in and out of them with the rhythm of the seasons. Except in the few densely-peopled, southern areas, we have been travellers, traders and gatherers-in, not permanent settlers and residents. Our hinterland inland waterway, the St. Lawrence- Great Lakes system, on which our history has hinged so critically for over four hundred years, and which can frontier did not, upon the economic and political support of the metro politan centres of Europe and of such major cities as Montreal and Toronto for one-third of the year or more. Conversely, the extreme summer heat, also creates its problems. To give you some notion of the possible range of climate in Canada, our national capital annually records high and low temperatures with a spread of as much as 125° Fahrenheit between them.

Closely connected with the difficulty of climatic extremes are the problems presented by the rigours of Canada's topography. We have great areas of rich soil, but much of our land is either muskeg or permafrost hitherto not to be settled or even traversed, or else it is the immensity of rock which has yielded a wealth of fur, timber and minerals but which is unsuitable for more than sparse and scattered human settlement. One historian has chosen to describe Canada in stark terms as a vast hinterland exploited for a few staples from the narrow base of the St. Lawrence and the lower great lakes, the Saskatchewan River valleys and the Fraser River delta, where the great mass of its population lives. A similar observation could well be made about the maritime provinces. Their pioneers, however, were fishermen seeking new fishing grounds or seamen-farmers in quest of new pastures. This has been true ever since the Vikings touched our north-eastern shores a thousand years ago.

Unlike the nation to our south with its richer soil and milder climate, we have not been able fully to occupy our vast territories. We have moved in and out of them with the rhythm of the seasons. Except in the few thin, densely-peopled, southern areas, we have been travellers, traders and gatherers-in, not permanent settlers and residents. Our hinterland has depended almost completely, in a way that the more self-sufficient American frontier did not, upon the economic and political support of the metropolitan centres of Europe and of such major cities as Montreal and Toronto. You will also become keenly aware as you travel through our Dominion's six time zones and three thousand mile breadth, of the striking manner in which the great regions divide Canadians from one another and give each a different type of environment to cope with and different natural resources to draw upon and I may add lend variety and interest to the Canadian scene: the Maritime provinces, two large islands and two peninsulas riding far out into the North Atlantic; the vast shield of the world's oldest rock in Northern Quebec and Ontario; the expanse of the central prairies; the western mountain regions, and the strip of Pacific Coast country with its softer climate and giant forests.

The physical difficulties and complexities of this land have deeply affected our national character and history. They have made great virtues out of some of the sterner, human qualities -- of frugality and caution, discipline and endurance. Geography, perhaps even more than the influence of the churches, has made us puritans.

Canada has often been called a young country. In this fourth century of settlement, and close to the hundredth year of the Dominion's creation, we can hardly be described as very young. Unformed, in many ways even

now undeveloped, still open to unknown possibilities, Yes. We are all these things because of the character of our environment and the way we depend upon it for a living, but not because in relation to the newer countries of the world we have a short history, nor are without political maturity.

Nature for us has usually been an enemy, symbolized by the terrifying spirit-creature that the fur traders told about as having been encountered in the forests of the trackless north. Or if not an enemy, nature has been a source of bounty to be treated with awe. She has rarely been something to be tamed or enjoyed. At best we might exploit her quickly and move on. It is little wonder that the atmosphere of our towns still often suggests that of the mining camp or the logging drive. All too often we have not built for beauty or permanence. Even our largest communities still have about them, certainly in the outskirts, something of the air of sleeping compounds or trading posts. Our cities and towns too often are unworthy of the splendid countryside in which they have been built. We are apt to enjoy looking at architecture chiefly when it is being put up or pulled down. Perhaps it is because we have such a vast amount of land that it has been as yet little measured by the imagination, however accurately and often it, and its gross national product, have been measured by the Bureau of Statistics.

We have not, until the revolution that has just begun to overtake us at midcentury, been much concerned to foster the arts. But it is true that in the past decade there have been some hopeful developments. A few years ago a public body was set up free of governmental interference and

with a substantial endowment for the purpose of fostering scholarship, the arts and literature. Of our marked progress in these fields, the Canada Council is both a symbol and an instrument.

Signs of a new growth in the arts, however, leave us little cause for complacency as long as we neglect the study of the environment. We have often ignored the long-term aesthetic and social needs of town planning, in order to pursue immediate economic ends. We have given to our communities, not the fine squares and noble public buildings and pleasant urban parks which belong to peoples who have known better how to embellish life, but have surrendered too fully to those means of transportation upon which our course our livelihood and survival have depended. In a way perhaps unsurpassed even in the United States, we have worshipped first the railway and then the automobile. When we were experiencing our first heady decade of real prosperity some fifty years ago -- and most Canadians agreed with the Prime Minister of the day who told us that the new century belonged to Canada -- we built not only one but in addition projected two other transcontinental railways for which we were not ready. We have been paying for our false optimism ever since. But now we face the even heavier monetary and human cost imposed by the North American idolatry of the motor car.

What transportation and construction will do to our urban scene is by no means settled yet. Much the most important phase of our industrialization belongs to the past twenty years. There are striking signs of our economic growth in the nineteen fifties: such as the creation of the giant seaway for shipping and power on the St. Lawrence River and the construction of the pipelines to bring the newly discovered western oil and gas across Canada.



Close to 20,000 miles of these have been built within this country in the last ten years. The pipeline is often referred to as the "prime mover" of the present day, just as was the railway in the last century. Engineers tell us that oil and gas pipelines may be joined in the next decade by those carrying solids. I think it true to say that the pipeline is transforming Canadian transportation.

The biggest changes are yet to come. Within the next two generations we shall probably undertake as much new building as there has been in this country since the beginning. Our secondary and service industries are expected to take corresponding strides forward. And we have begun to face the problem of fostering the human resources which we have often neglected in the past. But the full powers of an industrial society are still before us. To a degree not found in more industrialized nations, we still have it within us to decide what kind of society we are to be and how we may guide the economic and cultural revolution we have begun to face.

We must approach it in our own way. When you examine some of the peculiarly Canadian aspects of the two identities we rather loosely call Business and Labour, you will discover that they are in some degree of contrast with what we find in the United States. "Prudence" and "moderation" are words that come readily to mind when one thinks of financial and industrial concerns in this country. There is a lowland Scots canniness and common sense about their directors and senior officers. Perhaps I should add that these qualities have sometimes been linked by critics with a lack of boldness and imagination and the will to live dangerously. Young men in Canadian business move from firm to firm or from industry to industry less frequently than do their American counterparts.

The Canadian investor is also conservative and he tends to prefer

enterprises whose common stocks have something of the security of government bonds. Indeed he is inclined to prefer bonds and life insurance (we are relatively the most heavily insured people in the world) to any investments, however attractive, involving a large element of risk. I except of course the great volume of highly speculative bets placed on the most volatile of mining stocks, which a sociologist might describe as the Canadian equivalent of football pools or national sweepstakes.

One result of this caution and of the limited amount of money for investment available in Canada is that the great majority of ventures requiring large quantities of capital have been undertaken by non-Canadians and particularly in this century by Americans. Its influx from the United States and with it the American entrepreneurs who often come to settle permanently here has been of immense economic benefit to this country. Canadians have frequently expressed the fear that such a boon was being purchased at the cost of future political independence. But the historian surveying such American economic influences over the past century or so seems to have good reason for drawing the opposite conclusion: that the financial and industrial stimulus we have thus received may well have been one of those things which have enabled us to assert our political independence so effectively.

Something of a parallel can be seen in the history of the labour movement in Canada. In the early days of our industrialization our labour unions drew much on the experience and knowledge of the British unions and the British labour movement. Inevitably, however, and under much the same influences as those to which I referred a moment ago in the movement of capital, Canadian labour turned more and more for help to the great American trade unions.

Thus many Canadian unions are part of international bodies whose headquarters are in the United States and who still exercise some degree of influence or control. An example is the very powerful steel workers union. It is worth noting that its Canadian national office, with its excellent equipment for research and its professional staff, provides for Canadian locals the leadership which originally had to come from outside if there was to be any union organization in steel at all. In other industries, such as automobile manufacturing and non-ferrous metals, where ownership and control reside largely in American parent companies, the Canadian Unions have found that membership in the international was the most effective way to gain an adequate bargaining position. I should also add that most Canadian unions, whether they have an international connection or not, derive great strength and some sense of identity and common purpose from their membership in the Canadian Labour Congress. And I should point out that the Confederation des Syndicats Nationaux, chiefly French-speaking, has been a major force in the Province of Quebec.

In spite of many differences, however, it is the similarities between American and Canadian labour that are most significant. Like American union members and unlike those almost everywhere else, Canadian workers have not thought of themselves as a single class, nor have they reacted as a class to fundamental issues. They have been much more likely to regard themselves less as producers than as consumers and as owners. Nor has there been, in the strictly European sense of the word, a bourgeoisie for them to react against. There are no clearly defined class divisions in Canadian society. Instead of class conflict, sectional and religious differ-

ences have supplied most of the matter for our social and political arguments.

These considerations lead directly to the central facts of our political life. Unlike the other nations in this hemisphere, Canada has no revolutionary tradition, with its myths and heroes. Existence was too precarious and too dependent upon the merchants and administrators and soldiers sent out from the imperial centres of Paris and London to allow for revolution. This trend was strongly reinforced by the conservatism of the early settlers. Those of French origin stoutly rejected both the American and the French Revolutions and all their works. The English-speaking refugees from the rebellious thirteen colonies went north in order to live in a country that would still be ruled by British law and social custom.

The appeal of later would-be revolutionaries to such a population, was extremely limited, especially when the restless or dissatisfied could so easily cross the border. Canada, in fact, has been from the beginning a stopping point for millions of Europeans on their journey to the hoped-for prosperity of the United States. Even now there are at least as many Canadian-born persons living there as the total population of several of our provinces. Meanwhile fresh waves of foreign immigration have been moving into Canada. Since the end of the Second World War, the number of new arrivals has equalled nearly one-seventh of our total population. The mobility of our people, both within the country and across our borders is extremely high; Canadians, new and old alike, change their place of residence on the average every six years. Such mobility is in itself a strong factor making for a conservative social and political order for the advocates

of rapid change rarely have time to organize a discontented community. On the other hand, there is no doubt that there are many Canadians who are all too immobile: men and women who because of their age or limited education or other handicaps are unable to move from one industry or one town to another. These are the stranded victims of rapid industrialization. But their plight is not peculiarly Canadian.

To look at another aspect of Canadian conservatism, we present an image of the frontier radically different from the more familiar one to the south of us. Unlike the American wild west, western Canada was planned and ordered by government and large private corporations in advance of settlement. Since the mid-nineteenth century it has been dominated by priest and mounted policeman, Hudson's Bay factor and bank manager, rather than by sheriff's posse or self-sufficient pioneer. The company town, often isolated in the wilderness and based on a single industry, with company and union assuming many communal responsibilities, has been an important part of this pattern.

The large-scale, carefully planned enterprise, dominating its field and aided by government regulation and support is typical of our whole development. The story of the Hudson's Bay Company, the Canadian Pacific Railway, the great metal monopolies runs through our history. It is hard to conceive of mid-twentieth century Canada without the Crown corporations, those semi-independent governmental bodies containing features of both public and private enterprise. The device of the Crown corporation has been used to manage our largest railway system, to develop hydro-electric power, to market Canadian wheat, to administer the nation's major shipping

harbours, to create a profitable petro-chemical industry, a national research council, a national film-producing unit and a great passenger air service. It has been used to build and maintain the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which is not only the largest but also, in terms of its productions, one of the finest radio and television networks in the world. The Crown Corporation has been used, as in the Second World War when over seventy of them were created to meet the needs of war production, to undertake tasks which private capital would not or should not be responsible for, yet which are better handled outside the organization of government. In spite of the huge measure of state enterprise represented by these Crown corporations, such terms as "public control" or "government planning" still arouse suspicion in the minds of many Canadians. Hence these government bodies have grown in a typically Canadian manner - for practical rather than ideological reasons. And finally they illustrate the way in which the stark facts of geography and the bias of our history have shaped our thinking and our institutions.

The Canadian constitution, what little there is of it in written form, sets up the objectives of peace, order and good government, rather than those of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." As the historian William Morton has pointed out, we are a society which is founded on the principle of allegiance rather than of social contract, on the organic growth of tradition itself rather than by an explicit act of reason or will. One of the most fundamental but least obvious differences between our North American nation and its neighbour lies in this: that for Canadians the fact and principle of authority were established prior to the fact and

principle of freedom.

This has been an advantage in a society like ours. Authority and allegiance under our monarchy have allowed us a wide diversity of customs and rights in a way that the rational scheme and abstractions of republican democracy could not. We are a plural community made up of two major and many minor cultural groups. There is no distinct, uniform and overwhelmingly Canadian way of life into which newcomers are expected to be caught up and reshaped. It has been said that while the American treatment of immigrants is that of the melting pot, ours may be likened to a mosaic. Differences are welcomed. In our cultural and religious diversity, as in the federal structure of our government and in the conservative allegiance to authority that guarantees and holds together this diversity, we have been compared to the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. The comparison may sound odd; it has at least the virtue of making one look beneath that obvious gloss of North Americanism and discern those natural differences between ourselves and our neighbours which give our international border its meaning.

It suggests too that we may have much in common with the plural and diversified communities of other Commonwealth nations. For, like Canada, they were formed by practical compromise through a process of historical evolution, rather than by the application of logic. Independence through the growth of responsible government, was still, in 1960 in Nigeria and in 1961 in Tanganyika, being adapted to the needs of the Commonwealth's growing number of diverse communities. This process was first seen here in Canada a century ago.

Most Canadians are proudly conscious of the fact that next to

Great Britain we are the oldest nation in the Commonwealth. We hope we have learned the lessons which diversity must teach a people; but in spite of the sincere warmth and affection with which I know you will be received wherever you go in Canada, you may discover hidden pockets of sentiment contrasting sharply with the tolerance which I believe to be characteristic of the great majority of Canadians. You may well run across the sort of person who is moved to look unsympathetically on our immigrants, particularly the two and a half million new Canadians who have arrived here since 1945 -- in spite of the fact that his own ancestors were not exactly original members of society. There is however no question that our new Canadians are making an essential and vastly important contribution to Canadian life.

Our experience of the plural society has been real and searching. But even its limited successes were not easily achieved. As the novelist Hugh MacLennan has put it, "Not only was this country formed out of the flotsam and jetsam of three or four defeated racial and political groups; some of these groups had once been bitter enemies of one another. But they had to live here, and they had to live in peace with one another." The cost of doing so has been high. We have had to do without a very clear image of ourselves, without a national culture, in the sense that these are to be found in Europe and the United States. The majority of Canadians are still not capable of speaking both our official languages (although in the last few years happily there has begun a ground swell of feeling and action to overcome this neglect), and a sizable number of Canadians from the minority groups have not yet learned either language.



In our politics the sword play of ideas, real intellectual debate, has been a luxury that we have often had to do without, if we were going to hold together at all. Our loose federal constitutional structure, with immense reserves of power vested in the provinces, has made it very difficult to tackle many new problems; I refer particularly to those which come from rapid industrialization, problems which are national in scope, but provincial in constitutional terms. The province of Quebec, in particular, represents not just one of ten local governments. It stands, with the strong emotion of conviction in the minds of French-speaking Canadians, as the symbol of French culture in North America. It has taken the English-speaking majority many generations to accept that fact -- not grudgingly or indifferently but proudly as a mark of the rich variety of our national life.

Lastly, we can never forget that always, with all our compromises and frustrations as a small country in everything but geography, we have to live next door to the most powerful nation on earth. As a result of this, one Canadian has ventured to say with more humour than accuracy that we are a people bounded on one side by the northern lights and on the other by an inferiority complex just as vivid. The vast influence of American culture is now beginning to reach all of you as strongly as it has affected us for many generations. Like us you recognize the success and the ability of the Americans at so many things and their generosity and good will. Canadians are sometimes critical of their neighbours. But if we would only admit it, each of us in our own way possesses some unattractive habits and traits. What is important is to acknowledge and accept gladly and without jealousy, the best things into our own lives from wherever they come. In the end we can

each of us realize our own true national individuality by searching out first what is good and only secondly inquiring into its origin.

If I had to sum up the lesson of the Canadian experience -- in living with ourselves, in living with the Americans, in adapting to our needs our European inheritance and in responding to the demands of a northern environment, I should put it like this: the life of a nation like that of an individual, is not something to be lived in the innocent and happy illusion that other people can be made to like us, or to resemble us, but something to be endured on a basis of reality. The big problems are not ones which can really ever be settled and "fixed" by some magic formula, some act of revolution, some political system. They are the problems we must teach ourselves to live with, just as all peoples, for the first time in human history, are now simply forced to learn to live with one another, if we are to survive at all. So perhaps at last the lesson of the Canadian experiment has become relevant not just for ourselves but for others. Canadians have had to outgrow first, a pro-French or pro-British colonial attitude, a mixture of pride and subservience, and then later, a tough nationalist assertiveness. But our experience has meant, at its best, these past three centuries and more, something deeper than either the obverse or the reverse of the colonial mentality. It has created "a common psychology of endurance and survival", an ability to accept compromise and illogical variety, and even at times a sense of inferiority or defeat, and, in the end, to transcend them.

Just as I think this country because of its experience has a role to play in the world community, so has the family of nations to which we belong. The question of whether the existence of the Commonwealth has much bearing on the great matters of war and peace has often been asked. I do not intend

to argue the point now. But I would like to repeat something said recently by one of our most respected diplomatists. He suggested that the Commonwealth's course is not set one way or another but that its role and function depend heavily at any given time on a conscious act of will on the part of all of us. "I believe," he said, "that there is a reality in the personal relationships in diplomacy among Commonwealth countries. At the risk of sounding theological, I believe it because I have experienced it. At least", he continued, "there is a reality for believers."

It seems to me that this Conference is an example of an act of will, of a decision to stay in touch with one another, to trust one another, to work together as a community. I believe the Commonwealth is an association which is moving towards a fuller agreement on the few great moral issues that really matter.

We Canadians find ourselves happy as one of its senior members. This Conference brings home to us its nature and genius. It would, I think, be quite impossible to assemble representatives of thirty-four countries and territories whose relations were those of foreign states, in a gathering as intimate and informal as this one. Our membership in the Commonwealth makes it possible. Our Conference will, I have no doubt, achieve its primary purpose, but it will do something else as well. It will help to bring Commonwealth countries closer together. It will help to strengthen those bonds of friendship among us which Edmund Burke described in a familiar phrase as "light as air but strong as links of iron." If this be true, none could be happier than your Canadian hosts.

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