



DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTÉRIEURES

communiqué

No: 43
No.:

DIFFUSION: NOT FOR PUBLICATION BEFORE
RELEASE: 24:00 HOURS, APRIL 28, 1978

NOTES FOR A
SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE JEAN-PIERRE GOYER,
MINISTER OF SUPPLY AND SERVICES
AND
ADVISOR FOR FRANCOPHONE AFFAIRS
TO THE
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
ON THE
OCCASION OF THE
TWENTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL
FRANCE-CANADA CONFERENCE,
DIJON, FRANCE,
APRIL 28 TO MAY 1, 1978

(TRANSLATION)

I take great pleasure in being among you again this year, since the Prime Minister of Canada has once more bestowed upon me the honour of choosing me to represent him at the France-Canada Association Conference. I would like to pass on to you Mr. Trudeau's best wishes on behalf of the Canadian government and people. I am also very happy to be in the beautiful city of Dijon, in the shadow of the palace of the Dukes of Burgundy. I could almost picture myself as a second Charles the Bold, in the sense that I venture to speak to you in the birthplace of Bossuet.

I know I am speaking here to friends of Canada, to Frenchmen who take an interest in our country. It was with Frenchmen that our country's history and an essential part of its culture began. The French and the Canadians, already related by race, became brothers in arms in the world wars of the twentieth century; now they are learning together how to become brothers of mankind in the common struggle against underdevelopment and poverty.

With friends, one should be candid! I know that you are interested in and concerned about Canada's current problems, so I would like to speak quite frankly about the national unity crisis besetting my country. Far be it from me to export Canada's constitutional debate or domestic quarrels. I simply want to help you gain a deeper understanding of the problem. Such an understanding is essential to strengthening the bonds of friendship between Canada and France; and of course I include in that friendship the special relationship between France and Quebec.

My talk will revolve around three themes. First there is the idea that Quebec is a colony within the Canadian federation. Some people have taken it into their heads that Quebecers are a colonized people. For them, the "colony of Quebec" is not a thing of the distant past, but of the present. For them, Quebec is in a state of inferiority.

Such a view is unacceptable because it ignores the facts. It is based on a complete distortion of reality, and it is clearly biased - which boils down to the same thing. It is also an insult which is totally unfounded.

In a colony, those who make deals with the colonizers and help them to govern are seen by their compatriots as traitors or turncoats. But whom on earth have I made a deal with? To whom did I sell myself? To the people in Quebec who elected me democratically? To whom

did I sell myself? To a party led by a French Canadian, Pierre Elliott Trudeau? To whom did I sell myself? To a state the head of which is a French Canadian, Jules Léger?

Let us be honest and objective! There is no doubt that power is not evenly balanced in Canada. For a variety of reasons, French Canadians have yet to be fully recognized whether in business or within the federal bureaucracy, but considerable progress has been made in the last twenty years or so. To say that we are a colonized people is to deliberately ignore the efforts made by French Canadians who have gained more and more influence in all spheres of activity. It is also to ignore the fact that the Province of Quebec, like the other Canadian provinces, has considerable autonomy in most of the sectors which directly affect the public at large.

Quebec wishes to control its economy and feels that political independence is necessary in order to do this. Many of you may feel that this aspiration is completely natural, but I ask you, what has been the trend in the world's economic development for the last thirty years? Has it not followed the road to interdependence between countries? An interdependence which is reinforced by growth in international trade, modern means of communication, transportation, the transfer of technology, the industrialization of developing countries and the financial system. The economies of different countries are clearly interdependent. This trend is increasing, and both France and Canada are fully aware of, and involved in the whole process.

The weaker a country is in terms of its GNP, its population or its degree of industrialization, the more dependent it is on other countries. Where would that put Quebec if it separated?

Having said this, I would like to point out that the situation is far from catastrophic for the so-called "Quebec colony". I see that even the Premier of Quebec feels that his province has achieved success from an economic and cultural point of view. René Lévesque told the members of the Economic Club in New York: "...now, at long last, Quebec is a fully developed society. It has over six million people, eighty-two per cent of whom are French by descent, language and cultural heritage. Montreal, our metropolis, is the second largest French city in the world. Our gross national product would make us twenty-third among the nations of the world and eleventh on a per capita basis."* Therefore federalism has not stifled Quebec.

...3

*Speech given by René Lévesque to the Economic Club, New York, on January 25, 1977.

I feel that Quebec can continue to develop under a federal system which is renewed and adapted to current conditions, especially since the entire country is searching for a collective identity and since this process will inevitably help to create equality of opportunity for its citizens.

The thesis that Quebec must become independent in order for the French culture to survive in that province has become popular with Quebecers and those Frenchmen who are overly concerned with preserving the French language and culture in America. What is the present situation? That brings me to my second theme.

First, we must locate the problem in its proper context. In a North American continent inhabited by 240 million Anglophones, the French language and culture are constantly being challenged, and we Francophones cannot deny that it is difficult to resist this pressure. Of course, French is becoming more widespread across Canada because of the federal government's efforts, but this is also happening because of the vitality of the language itself and the new pride Canadians feel in their linguistic richness which makes their country culturally diverse and distinguishes them from their neighbours to the south.

Culturally speaking, Canadian federalism is an admirable system of mutually reinforcing support. Quebec makes an essential contribution to Canada's national identity and thus encourages English-speaking Canada to develop and distinguish itself from the United States. In turn, English-speaking Canada serves as a buffer between Quebec and the overwhelming influence of the United States. I have always been surprised to hear pessimists and defeatists speak of Quebec's cultural "suffocation" when, at the same time, some people in English Canada talk about a French "invasion" from St. John's, Newfoundland, to Vancouver, British Columbia. If this is the case, then Quebecers can hardly be suffocating!

What is the reason for this "survival" if I may employ this euphemism to describe the resounding affirmation of the French culture that has taken place in Quebec? Insofar as the use of the French language and culture is concerned, Quebec has always enjoyed complete liberty. The Constitution gives it full jurisdiction over education and allows it to pass legislation in many related areas.

As an aside, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that under the Constitution Canada's provinces have full or partial jurisdiction over areas such as natural resources, social policy, municipal affairs, agriculture and the administration of

justice. Furthermore, the federal government has given French Canada a large number of effective cultural instruments.

It is also said that the French culture in Quebec is threatened by a demographic situation unfavourable to French Canadians. I am not a doctor and so I cannot assess the contraceptive effect of federalism on the birth rate in Quebec, but I do wish to point out that according to statistics, the Francophone population in Quebec is increasing rather than diminishing.

To say that there will be six million French-speaking inhabitants in Quebec in the year 2,000 and that there are already six and one-half million across Canada today is only one side of the coin. It is not necessary to be born French in order to speak French. In fact, more and more English Canadians are speaking French nowadays, and because of the bilingualism policy of the federal government, this trend will continue. And there is also the fact that the provinces have undertaken to expand the teaching of French.

In addition to its official languages policy, the federal government has established structures to enable artists and cultural groups to express themselves as they wish. It provides them with the means of dissemination, funds, services and facilities necessary for cultural expression. Consider, for example, the role of Radio-Canada, the French counterpart of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the National Film Board, the Canada Council, the National Museums and others as agencies of cultural proliferation. Think about the organizations dedicated to artistic creation, the spread of the French culture in Quebec and the growth of its French-Canadian dimension, and you will soon realize that there is a will in Canada to protect and to strengthen its French culture.

The results of a Gallup Poll published in June 1977 furnished proof of the increased interest among English-speaking Canadians in the French language. Fifty-one per cent of those questioned said they would like to have learned French and twenty per cent said they had learned it, making a total of seventy-one per cent. Compared with this are figures of sixty and thirty-seven per cent - a total of ninety-seven per cent - for French Canadians.

In more general terms, it must be recognized that the present political system is responsible for the economic stability required for the establishment and blossoming of the French fact. Culture cannot be dissociated from the political and economic well-being of the State. If conditions change it may be necessary to revise certain constitutional and other mechanisms to convince Canada's six and one-half million French-speaking inhabitants that the Canadian federation is their best protection against assimilation by the 240 million English-speaking North Americans around them.

However, there is no point in casting aside old myths just to create new ones. In Canada we have established extremely flexible institutions to solve our problems. All we have to do is use them. Quebec, in separating, would become an island in a sea of Anglophones. Quebecers would be hard pressed to demand that others in North America communicate with them in French. Conversely, a strong Quebec in a united Canada ensures the blossoming of the French culture in North America, and it is Canada's tolerance and encouragement of cultural diversity that has made this possible.

In inviting all Canadians from coast to coast to use their institutions to solve their problems, I have overlooked one aspect which is often mentioned with respect to Quebec - its right to self-determination and independence. Independence - and this is my third theme - is said to be essential since it is natural for a people with their own language, culture and territory to form a country.

I would not like to give you the impression that I am taking these matters lightly, but if everyone subscribed to this theory, there would be no fewer than 2,500 independent countries on Earth meeting these criteria perfectly. However, we cannot base our reasoning on absurdities. After all, the federal system exists precisely because it allows many ethnic groups to co-exist. Many countries have adopted a federative system of government because the presence of several ethnic groups or the size of their territory forced them to do so. In the United States, Brazil, Canada and India, for example, both of these factors came into play: the vastness of the territory and ethnic diversity. Many unified countries are trying to introduce certain federative structures into their system of government to meet current needs. This process is a sound venture since it does not imply a break but rather continuity and adjustment.

By constantly emphasizing the circumstantial and "opportunistic" characteristics of federalism, people tend to forget, I think, one important aspect: the feeling of unity it generates. It is often said that the federal system enables groups to benefit from the economic and political advantages of the union without denying their distinctive characteristics. This is undoubtedly true. However, I do not think that this is the only feature of our system. Federalism and mercantilism are not synonymous. At the outset, federalism may be a marriage of interests or convenience, but in the long run an identity and a sense of belonging are born which sooner or later transcend the material basis of the initial alliance. Paradoxically, this feeling emerges only if the rights of the founding groups are protected, their cultural identity preserved and their autonomy respected. That is true self-determination. In this respect, I

consider that Quebec has already exercised self-determination by joining and remaining in Confederation. This is what the Prime minister had in mind when he spoke of Quebec's separation as a "crime against humanity". These are strong words, which can be explained by examining the meaning given in the Renaissance to the word "humanism": it meant the concrete development of human qualities. Federalism represents a form of political humanism through which people unite and grow together. Separation would destroy this humanism.

Perhaps you have been told that Quebec never developed a sense of belonging to Canada and that consequently its initial self-determination was imaginary and that Confederation should be renegotiated as if it were a common commercial agreement. First let me tell you that all the polls conducted in Quebec up to now belie this claim.

If this sense of belonging did not exist, why would the majority of Quebecers regularly express their support for Canadian federalism? Why would they be content to ask for its renewal rather than its demise? Precisely because the majority of Quebecers do not want to burn their bridges and do not want to leave the family. The bond exists and cannot be broken without upsetting the sense of identity and being of the vast majority of people of good will in Quebec as well as the rest of Canada.

To be convinced that most Quebecers are federalists, one need only to refer to the results of polls taken from the sixties up to the present. All of them prove that the percentage of separatists has varied by only one per cent during this period, and that it has levelled off at twenty per cent. There is thus no basis for speaking of irreversible historical trends. In a recent poll taken by the Quebec Institute of Public Opinion, people were asked about the option which is most favourable to the separatists - namely sovereignty-association, which is separation followed by association with the rest of Canada. Only 28.4 per cent of Quebecers were in favour of the idea, while 58.3 per cent were opposed to it.

One often hears that young people are in favour of separation - but what do the findings of the Quebec Institute of Public Opinion indicate? The polls show that 61.9 per cent of young people from 18 to 24 are opposed to sovereignty-association. Moreover, when Quebecers are asked which level of government serves their

interests better, the same poll shows that Quebecers are more satisfied with the federal than with the provincial government; the figures indicate that 58.4% of Quebecers are satisfied with the federal government while only 44.9% express satisfaction with the provincial government. As for the popularity of the Prime Minister of Canada and the Premier of Quebec, one cannot escape the conclusion that Mr. Trudeau clearly outshines Mr. Lévesque in Quebec. In this province, 46.9 % of the population are satisfied with the Prime Minister, whereas the figure for Mr. Lévesque is only 26.9%. Mr. Lévesque is thus not justified in claiming that he is the most legitimate and most popular spokesman for Quebec.

These reassuring figures should not, however, lull us into forgetting that we are going through a period during which constitutional changes will be necessary. Far be it from me to deny that Quebecers want changes. But in this they are no different from Canadians in Western Canada or in the Atlantic provinces. It is important that we face the facts: Quebecers want changes, but they want to remain within Confederation. Change does not mean separation.

The basic fact of the matter is that we are not in a static situation; on the contrary, we are involved in a dynamic process which will entail inevitable readjustments. We must stop basing our vision of the future on the past; we must stop projecting the bitterness and resentment of the past into the future. And if I may apply Jean Monnet's famous statement, "We are not uniting countries we are bringing people together", to the Canadian scene, I would say that in the renewed federalism which is within our grasp, the aspirations of all Canadians can be fulfilled.