



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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Text of a Speech delivered by the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, Prime Minister of Canada, at the Annual General Meeting of the Canadian French-Language Weekly Newspapers' Association at La Malbaie, Quebec, on August 17, 1963.

* Indicates paragraph delivered in French.

... Mr. Chairman, you have the right to be proud of your Association and of each of its members. The role of the weekly press is of the greatest importance, in encouraging worthwhile local initiative, in circulating news and information and also in moulding opinion at the primary levels of human activity - that is at the family level, at the municipal level, and within regional limits. It is, therefore, man himself, the human being, that you are interested in, even more than the mass of readers. You are familiar with international politics, national problems of course, but you are serving mainly the local or regional economy. That important, that vital, role only you can fulfil efficiently.

This work is accomplished throughout Canada by more than 1,000 weekly newspapers. But it must be noted that the French-language press makes a further and distinctive contribution. You play an essential part in safeguarding and developing French culture in North America.

* Canada is rich and privileged in more than one way, particularly because she is the heir and depository of two great cultures.

* Your Association extends beyond the geographical limits of the Province of Quebec, since its members are also recruited from the Atlantic Provinces, in Ontario and the Prairie Provinces. Therefore you are the very image of French Canada that is asserting itself everywhere in this country.

* I believe it is important to accentuate this fact - the recognition that Canada is a truly bilingual country with two basic cultures, to which many others have been added to our great advantage.

* Canadian unity is now in another difficult period. These difficulties have common causes. For some years, Canadians have been more than ever conscious of the encroachment of American culture. They feel that they are gradually losing control of their economy. On the other hand, they realize that their standard of living, which they do not want to see lowered, depends in a very large measure on the export of our products to the United States and the import of American capital. This is the reason why they realize that political independence cannot in itself be very effective in changing an economic situation which has become inseparable from prosperity.

* This situation inevitably gives rise to frustration. A very few English-speaking Canadians regret and look to the past. A few others are tempted to stop resisting and become Americans. However, the great majority have decided to react positively to the American encroachment, to accentuate their identity as Canadians and to get closer to their fellow French-speaking Canadians.

Not Flight but Resistance

* In short, the solution to the problem is not flight but resistance. When it is impossible to prevent this encroachment, one has to attempt to assimilate and control it.

In meeting this problem - and others concerned with maintaining our identity, we must first rebuild our political and economic society in terms of the problems and needs of contemporary world. It means that both the founding races must meet together more often and become better acquainted. I am convinced that such closer relations will be mutually profitable. I also think that the common sources and similar nature of so many of the problems of English-speaking Canada and French-speaking Canada will give us a chance to get closer and to understand each other better. Basically, we have the same problems, and to find the right solutions we need each other. In this field, at least, we are inseparable.

We are also inseparable in the sense that hundreds of thousands of English-speaking Canadians reside in Quebec, and nearly a million French-speaking Canadians live outside Quebec. This latter fact has been officially recognized by the government of Quebec, when it created a Department of Cultural Affairs. Quebec, in this sense, is more than a province -- it is a motherland, but a motherland in a Confederation in a national partnership.

Progress Slow but Sure

* The bringing together of the two groups requires, amongst other things, that English-speaking Canada be more conscious of the aspirations of French-speaking Canada and that the latter be not too impatient if it finds that this consciousness seems slow to express itself. Real progress is being made from one generation to another. For example, the Bourassa doctrine on Canadian nationalism,

which was attacked as a heresy, a generation ago, is now accepted by practically all of English-speaking Canada. In short, if we do not advance at the same pace, we move at least in the same direction. This, I believe, is essential.

* It is necessary to recognize that in the historical and cultural sense our country is mainly formed of two races and that these two races must have equal rights and an equal opportunity in the expansion and in the control of the economy. But we must also recognize that a Canadian nation exists which, precisely, unites these two people who have founded and developed our country. When we no longer talk of Canadian unity in this country, Canada will have ceased to exist and then our two cultures will be in great danger.

* At this time when we are preparing to celebrate our centennial, it is advisable that Confederation should be reshaped to meet the requirements of the present hour. We want a 1963 model.

* Our federalism must be conceived in such a flexible way so as to permit the existence of a Canadian Government strong enough within the limits of its jurisdiction to fully play its part among the great nations of the world, while ensuring the progress and welfare of the Canadian population.

* But we also want to give the provinces all the powers granted to them by the Constitution and the means to exercise such powers. I wish to repeat that we must bring about a co-operative federalism - that is to say, a federalism free from any spirit of an unacceptable centralization.

New Era for Confederation

* At the end of the recent Federal-Provincial Conference, the Premier of Quebec emphasized that the Confederation has now entered a new era. I am convinced that in this new era more frequent discussions will enable the leaders of the provincial and federal governments to find solutions to present problems. I have no doubt that a permanent agency can also play an important part in federal-provincial relations. All this will ensure better understanding of our separate problems as well as of our common problems. It is on such understanding that good relations, friendship and co-operation are based.

* I know as well as you do that the Province of Quebec is different from others, because, while a province of Canada, it is the motherland of people living in other provinces.

* Quebec needs the means to keep her own identity; Quebec must have the means to act, to meet her present needs and also satisfy aspirations dating many centuries back.

Unity in Diversity

* But Canada also needs the means to keep her own national identity and to act for Canada, on the domestic level as well in the international field, especially in the effort to safeguard peace and security in the world. In order to give a new impetus to our economy as well as to continue our role in the world, we need a united Canada. Unity in diversity, unity of action as partners, equal partners. It is within such a healthy Canada that Quebec will be in a position to realize her aspirations.

Mr. Chairman, the Government that I am leading will do its best to establish such a status of equality between the two partners and to assure a better understanding, an easier and more continuous exchange of views and opinions between them.

To this end, I place great hope in the Royal Commission on Biculturalism which we have just created, which will clarify problems, recommend solutions and help government take the necessary action.

Steps Already Taken

We have already taken steps to have the French language not only recognized officially in the Government of Canada, but also - and this is important - to give it a more and more current use. It is our desire that, in all sectors of the Federal administration, French can be used as well as English. I know we will achieve this anticipated result and a bilingual Civil Service.

An increasing number of English-speaking Canadians are realizing that learning the French language is not a regrettable concession to our national circumstances, but an enriching cultural experience.

There is no more important problem facing this country - apart from peace and work for the people - than the maintenance and development of the Canadian Confederation, on the foundation of equal partnership, the only foundation that makes possible the Canadian nation. Such a nation, strong and united, is essential if we are not to be absorbed in some continental society, and thereby lose our own separate traditions and cultures, French and British.

I have already spoken about the problem of preserving this Canadian nation, of maintaining our Canadian identity, against the inevitable pressures from the U.S.A., all the stronger because they are friendly and, in many ways, have had good results for us.

Some Canadians, however, are beginning to ask themselves: "Why should we worry about 'saving' Canada from the American 'invasion' if we don't believe in a Canada to be saved, a Canada which is greater than its parts?"

I believe that there is such a Canada, of which we should all be proud to be citizens, whether we speak English or French.

I believe that there can be a Canadian nation within which the two basic cultures can develop in full and equal partnership.

I know that this can only be done if each group respects and understands the position of the other and each appreciates fully the contribution of the other to the building of the Canadian confederation. But I know that it can be done.

I believe also, as I have already said, that while Quebec is a province in this national Confederation, it is more than a province, because it is the heartland of a people, in a very real sense it is a nation within a nation.

I refuse to believe that, in an insecure and dangerous world, where universal brotherhood is now the alternative to universal extinction, where the crying need is for men to come together rather than break apart, all Canadians cannot live together in friendship and understanding, rejecting the dangerous counsel of extremes wherever it comes from, so that together we may achieve a great Canadian destiny.

S/C