



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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CANADA'S GREAT CHALLENGE

No. 63/21 Address by the Honourable Maurice Lamontagne,
President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada,
to the Canadian Club, Toronto, on November 4, 1963.

We will celebrate in 1967 the centennial of Confederation. This first century has been marked by great achievements and also at times by serious crises. The Riel incident, the school question in the West and in Ontario, our participation in war and the conscription issue have divided our two main ethnic groups and threatened our national unity.

Those successive crises have followed a common pattern. They resulted from action initiated in English-speaking Canada and the ensuing reaction of French-speaking Canada. The most acute manifestation of those crises was always the sharp conflict which opposed Ontario and Quebec. Each time, sooner or later, Ontario won its case and Quebec had to retreat and to adjust.

We are now going through another serious national crisis. But this time, a new pattern has appeared. The current crisis is the result of actions taken in Quebec and it comes at a period when there is, especially in Ontario, a much better understanding and appreciation of the "French fact" than in the past. The emergence of this unique crisis has bewildered a great number of English-speaking Canadians. And in their astonishment, they ask questions: "What is happening in Quebec? Why this sudden outburst when real efforts were being made to understand the French Canadians? What does Quebec want?"

Evolution of French Canada

It is impossible to understand what is happening in Quebec today without some knowledge of the main trends of its past evolution. Indeed, the present discontent has deep historical roots. It is a feeling as old as the French-Canadian people itself, although it has been expressed recently in new and stronger terms.

The whole history of the French Canadians has been characterized by a constant reality - foreign domination - and by a perpetual dream - complete liberation. The basic conflict between the dream and reality has resulted in frustration and discontent.

The historical roots of such feelings can be traced back to the French Régime, when the whole political and economic life of the French Canadians was determined in Paris. The conquest in 1760 brought a new threat to their cultural and religious institutions. It coincided with the beginning of a long struggle to preserve these institutions and to achieve political liberty.

Struggle for Political Control

Soon after the conquest, in 1774, the French Canadians obtained the right to speak their language and to practise their religion in Quebec. However, they felt that such a right would not be completely secure unless they had the control over their political institutions.

In 1791, an elective assembly was established, but the Governor and his ministers were not responsible to the elected members. A long and bitter fight soon developed over that issue between the Governor and the French-Canadian political leaders. It led to the rebellion of 1837 and to a new constitution in 1840. Finally, the battle for responsible government was won in 1848.

The political scene remained, however, the main concern of the French Canadians. The constitution of 1840 could not provide stable government; racial rivalries were still strong; economic conditions were worsening. The project of Confederation was submitted as a solution, but its discussion started another controversy, which retained the attention of French-Canadian leaders beyond 1867.

Soon after Confederation, another long quarrel developed on cultural institutions. As a result of economic stagnation in Quebec, many French Canadians emigrated to the Canadian West. They wanted to have their own schools but the English-speaking Canadians in Manitoba were not prepared to accept such institutions. That internal quarrel in Manitoba soon developed into a conflict between Ontario and Quebec. Other sources of division appeared in rapid succession: the Saskatchewan school question, Canadian participation in the Boer War and World War I, the imposition of conscription and the Ontario school question.

Meanwhile, an important constitutional evolution was taking place. In 1867, the Fathers of Confederation had established a strong central government. Some years later, however, the provinces, led by Quebec, initiated a movement to get wider powers and greater autonomy. That movement was strengthened by economic and social evolution, but especially by the decisions of the Privy Council in London. In the 1920's, the provinces had won their battle; they became, in fact, sovereign in their own field; the scope of their legislative jurisdiction widened, and they secured greater taxation powers.

State of Peaceful Coexistence

In the late 1920's, at the end of a long period of political struggle, the situation in Quebec could be summarized as follows:

(1) The French Canadians had succeeded in preserving their cultural institutions in Quebec, but they had failed to have them recognized in the rest of the country. Cultural survival had been secured, but cultural expansion had been prevented. Quebec would be bilingual, but the rest of the country would not.

(2) Self-government had been won in a wide range of activities. But experience had shown that French Canadians were likely to lose, when conflicts arose, if they did not have the political control over the situation. Thus, the main concern of the French Canadians was to preserve provincial autonomy and to enlarge its scope. Taschereau, Duplessis and later Lesage, in their own ways, helped to develop and maintain that tradition.

(3) After World War I, the period of active conflict was practically over. The so-called "Quebec reserve" had been created more or less by common agreement. A great number of English-speaking Canadians were opposed to the cultural expansion of the French Canadians outside Quebec; French Canadians were conscious of their failure and stopped trying to build a bilingual Canada. The "Quebec reserve" appeared to be a temporary settlement; it meant a situation of peaceful coexistence where the two groups ignored each other.

During that long period, the main effort of the French-Canadian leaders had been devoted to the political struggle. There was little energy left to improve the cultural institutions or to develop provincial autonomy into a powerful instrument of action and control. The cultural and social institutions were left almost entirely to the clergy, which could not participate actively in the political struggle.

Church and School

The Church had the complete responsibility for the educational system at all levels and, quite naturally, exercised its control according to its own objectives. During that period, the Church sincerely believed that industrialization and urbanization were undesirable and it was seeking to keep people on the farms.

The educational system faithfully reflected those views. Technical schools were not encouraged. Primary schools were badly organized and did not go beyond the very rudiments of knowledge. Secondary schools or classical colleges were primarily designed to prepare students for the priesthood. Those students who could not be persuaded to become priests could go to the university, if they had the financial means, but their choice was limited, for all practical purposes, to two professions: law and medicine.

Church and Labour

The social movements were also controlled by the Church. When the international labour unions invaded Quebec at the end of the nineteenth century, the Church became worried and, in 1901, the Archbishop of Quebec decided to organize the Confederation of Catholic Syndicates, which were designed to protect the moral and spiritual rather than the material interests of the workers. The same applied to the Catholic Farm Union.

Thus, the political struggle had led to the creation of the "Quebec reserve"; but the clergy dominated the "reserve" and wanted to keep it as a predominantly rural society. The scarcity of arable land and the high birth rate, however, made such an attempt completely unrealistic. Quebec was rapidly becoming a vast reserve of unskilled industrial workers and it was far from being prepared to play its full role in an industrial society. Its philosophy of life was not oriented in that direction; it did not have the required capital; its cultural and social institutions were badly lagging.

Slow Industrial Growth

The first industrial revolution, which was based on iron and coal, had an unfavourable impact on Quebec. When it appeared in the middle of the nineteenth century, it left the province with only one really favourable location factor: an abundant and cheap supply of labour. Labour-intensive and light-consumer-goods industries, such as textiles, boots and shoes and tobacco, were attracted to Quebec because they could not afford to pay high wages. However, the development of those industries was too slow to provide sufficient employment opportunities for a rapidly-growing labour force, at a time when older industries and trades, such as shipbuilding, were disappearing. As a result, many French Canadians moved to the West and about 500,000 emigrated to the United States during the last decades of the nineteenth century.

At the beginning of the present century, a new technological revolution appeared; it was based partly on water as a new source of energy, on substitutes for steel and on wood used in the fabrication of paper and plastics. That second industrial revolution had a very favourable impact on Quebec, chiefly because of its water, forest and mining resources.

After 1920, the old manufacturing industries, dependent on Canadian capital, on the Canadian market and cheap labour, developed slowly in Quebec. The most spectacular expansion took place in the sector of resource industries. The capital and the market for those industries were mainly American.

Industrialization as Invasion

Thus, the industrialization of Quebec came as an invasion, first from English-speaking Canada and Great Britain, and later from the United States. Those "foreign" sources provided the capital, the management and the skilled personnel; Quebec supplied the resources and labour. Moreover, the industrial "invaders" made no attempt to adjust themselves to the French-Canadian cultural environment and to learn the French language. Wherever they were located, they created their small community and they remained completely isolated from French-Canadian life. In their own way, they practised a diluted form of apartheid. The "two solitudes" still exist today in most cities of the province.

On the whole, however, the economic invasion was welcome in Quebec. The so-called intellectual élite, still engaged in the political struggle, did not really notice it. The political leaders accepted it as a blessing and offered advantageous arrangements for the exploitation of the natural resources of the province. For the ordinary people, it meant the end of the emigration movement, new job opportunities, an expanding market for farm products and

relatively high wages in the new industries. On the whole, the economic invasion meant higher standards of living and the people liked it, even though the intruders were English-speaking and Protestant.

The Position in 1939

On the eve of World War II, the situation in Quebec could be summed up in relatively simple terms. The distrust of the central government had become chronic as a result of the long political struggle. Provincial autonomy was seen as an imperative by the vast majority of the French Canadians. The intellectual élite was composed of a very small minority; it was beginning to be concerned by the economic invasion, but its influence on the community was negligible. Political leaders and the people were "conspiring" to welcome the industrial "invaders".

Quebec had become an economic colony dominated by an industrial élite which remained completely isolated from the cultural and social life of the French Canadians. But the cultural and social lag itself created a vacuum which prevented that situation from becoming a problem. For the time being, the economic invasion was welcome because it meant higher incomes and better standards of living and, in that way, it was preparing the French-Canadian people for its next major step in its overall evolution: the elimination of the cultural gap.

Hidden Cultural Revolution

The years extending between the late Thirties and 1960 can be described as the period of the hidden cultural and social revolution in Quebec. This revolution began in the field of education, mainly at the university level. New faculties or schools of science and engineering, of social sciences and commerce, were established and attracted a greater and greater number of students. A young French Canadian seeking a university education no longer limited his choice to law and medicine. Many of these students sought postgraduate training in the universities outside the province and outside the country. They travelled to Paris, to London and to several centers in the United States to acquire greater and more specialized knowledge.

As a result, an increasing number of French Canadians now have the training which permits them to expect much more from life than was expected in the past. They can now speak the language of the scientist, of the economist, of the engineer and of the businessman. The intellectual barrier to their well-being is more and more a thing of the past.

During that period, social movements, including labour unions, also made tremendous progress. Under new and more dynamic leadership, these groups strengthened their democratic character and put more emphasis on the material interests of their members.

This cultural and social revolution was hidden from English-speaking Canada by a political regime which perhaps still represented the traditional aspirations of the people but certainly did not reflect the new hopes of a rapidly growing élite. The end of this regime, begun in 1959 and completed in

1960, was greeted as a great political liberation. The cultural and social progress, which had been remarkable since the Thirties, suddenly appeared as a revolution, and its impact was immediately felt on Quebec's political life.

The end of the political struggle and a rising standard of living brought by rapid industrialization in the Twenties had enabled Quebec to devote more energies to its cultural and social life. But the closing of the cultural gap at the beginning of the Sixties revealed another vacuum: the French Canadians were not really participating in the leadership of their own economic life and, to the small extent that they did, they could not use their own language and their cultural background. Thus, economic emancipation became not a new but a more conscious and a more immediate aspiration.

As you can see, what has been called the "quiet revolution" in Quebec has deep historical roots; it is the result of a long evolution. It can be defined as an urgent need for self-assertion in political, cultural and economic affairs.

Situation Today

The present situation in Quebec is tense, confused and fluid. French Canadians have never been more conscious than they are now of the basic conflict between the fact of foreign domination and the dream of complete independence. They are in a rather unique position: they exercise very little control on their economic life - and in this respect, they constitute an economic colony - but they enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world, and have become used to the so-called American way of life. The conflict between the reality and the dream, between collective self-determination and individual security is reflected by the two solitudes which exist in the French-Canadian society itself.

On the one hand, the vast majority of the so-called *élite* believes that the situation of the French Canadians outside of Quebec, especially in the Federal Civil Service and inside Quebec in the private sector of the economy, has become intolerable. A majority of this group is still of the view that this situation can be changed fairly rapidly and is convinced that this would be the best solution for Quebec and Canada. An important minority, however, has become separatist, either because it refuses to make any compromise or because it believes that the English-speaking Canadians are not prepared to adjust.

On the other hand, the people are much less affected and frustrated than the *élite* by the cultural and economic domination. The average French Canadian thinks primarily in terms of material security and improvement for himself and his family. He feels that his rising standard of living is still closely associated with the industrial invasion, and he is certainly not yet prepared to break this association, because, to him, more development means more independence.

These "two solitudes" constitute a dominant feature of French-Canadian society today. If the different groups in the *élite* were to rally behind the extremist leaders, the dialogue between the "two solitudes" would soon develop and, as the experience of other countries shows, the people would eventually

follow its leaders for better or for worse. But it is quite clear that if the moderates succeed in changing the status quo and in working out a reasonable compromise, they will get the general support of the French-Canadian people.

This compromise will require important adjustments in the economic, cultural and political fields. French Canadians, especially in Quebec, should be able to participate fully in the direction of their economic life without having to give up their culture. This increasing participation should be part of a general plan that private corporations ought to initiate as quickly as possible, in order to adjust to the cultural and social environment.

In the cultural field, a much greater degree of bilingualism must be achieved outside Quebec. This will require a revision of teaching methods and programmes, the recognition of the historical and constitutional rights of French-Canadian minorities and the development of a bilingual Federal Civil Service in Ottawa.

In the political field, our federalism needs a new orientation. The Federal Government should be prepared to withdraw from existing and well-established joint programmes in areas which have been assigned to the provinces and to compensate financially those provincial governments which are willing to assume these additional responsibilities. This would make our federalism more flexible. In the fields which require joint intervention of both levels of government, such as economic development, new arrangements must be made to maintain continuing consultation in order to achieve co-ordinated action. This would make our federalism more co-operative and more effective. Finally, truly distinctive national symbols are needed to assert Canada's full sovereignty.

I am certain that such a general approach to the problems of Canadian unity is completely unacceptable to the extremists on both sides. I am quite sure that it would be supported by most French Canadians as a much better alternative to separatism. But is it acceptable to the majority of English-speaking Canadians? This vital question has not yet received a definite answer.

If their answer is in the negative, if they want to preserve the status quo, then the voice of the moderates in French Canada will cease to be heard and all of us will face a catastrophe. If, on the contrary, the answer is positive, if English-speaking Canadians accept the proposed new alliance as a challenge leading to new opportunities and new horizons, we will be much more united when we celebrate the centennial of Confederation than we were in 1867.

The movement for greater economic emancipation has already begun in Quebec. A federal-provincial conference will be held in Ottawa at the end of this month. I hope, that this will be only the first of a series of meetings, designed to reconsider and redefine our federal structure of government. A Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism has been set up and is now getting prepared to hold what I call a referendum on these vital matters. In the meantime, the preparations for the centennial of the Canadian Confederation are under way. But we will not have much to celebrate if we fail in those attempts to rebuild our unity. We began in 1864 to develop the compromise which was accepted in 1867. It will not be too early to get to work together in 1964, if we want to celebrate a new alliance in 1967. This is Canada's new and great challenge.