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DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

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Speech by the Hon. Paul Martin,  
Secretary of State for External Affairs,  
at a Centennial Banquet,  
University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario,  
on November 26, 1967, at 6:30 p.m.

"THE FUTURE OF CONFEDERATION"

Centennial Year is a time for the expression of a justified pride in our country. It is also a time for reflexion on what makes this country tick and what we can expect of it in the future.

From a glance at the programme of your Centennial week at the University it is obvious that you have been focussing on many of the most serious questions of Canada in 1967, for example the native peoples, international economic relations and the place of Quebec in Confederation.

Tonight I would like to bring together some of the underlying themes of your various discussions and consider the basis of Canadian Confederation and our future prospects.

There is no question about it - the problem of national unity is the most serious which Canadians must face as our 100th birthday comes to a close. We cannot afford to bury our individual or collective heads in the sand. No part of Canada is exempt from the responsibility of studying the problem; no group would be exempt from the consequences of a failure to accept this responsibility.

The question, as I see it, is one of finding ways for two communities to live together in the greater community which is Canada. I say "ways" and not "way" because I do not think that there is one magic formula for the solution of our unity problem. We are not looking for a law of physics which has so far eluded us but which, when found, would answer all our questions. No, we are engaged in the most complex of problems - to find modus vivendi among groups of human beings with different backgrounds, outlooks and characteristics. I look at it in terms of a process rather than a goal - a road rather than a terminus.

Some people take the line that there have always been differences between English and French speaking Canadians and that these differences have been overcome whenever they threatened the stability of the country. A little patching here, a minor concession there, has always done the trick. They would have us let the passage of time settle our current problems.

To me such a view is disastrously shortsighted. It ignores obvious facts. It is the precursor of inevitable national disintegration. The time for patching has past. We must look squarely at the changes which have been taking place with breathtaking rapidity in this country and begin to shape Confederation to fit the requirements of the future.

French Canada has made a sudden - and I can say without the slightest hesitation, welcome - appearance in the 20th century. It has at last embraced the revolutionary social and industrial developments which have marked the rest of Canada in the past few decades.

Accompanying these dramatic changes has been a growth of self-confidence. The Quebecer wants to participate fully in the development of his society; he wants to be assured of his place. His sense of community is just as strong as it ever was; his ability to promote the interests of his community has greatly increased.

Some French Canadians are even asking themselves whether they would not be better off alone without the limitations that they must accept in a federal system. Such sentiments may be extreme and unacceptable to the majority of Quebecers but they have deep roots in the French Canadian community. The concern of

all French Canadians is to adopt the course which seems to offer the best chance of their community's survival and development.

In the face of these realities we must all give thought to finding the paths which will lead Canada forward, as Laurier said, to a "higher destiny".

We must do all that is possible to give French-Canada complete confidence in Canadian institutions, to convince it that its "best chance" lies within Canada. For a strong Canada, there must be a strong and distinct French-Canadian community. Thus one of our essential objectives will only be reached if French Canada feels collectively secure within the country as a whole.

Concomitant with this approach, is the necessity of bringing French Canadians to contribute fully to the development of the whole country in a renewed federalism. I am certain that French Canada has a major role to play in the future of our country, that the best use it can make of its vitality, imagination and labour is in a great Canada, a Canada which respects the fundamental rights of individuals and groups, a Canada built on the foundations of two broad linguistic communities.

Serious study must continue to be undertaken to determine whether or not changes should be made in the federal political and administrative structure to accommodate the developments that I have been speaking about. We must not make a religion of traditional political structures which may warrant extensive amendment, addition or emendation.

Some claim that the Federal Government alone should make proposals as to the modifications which might be made in the constitution, but I think that we are faced here with responsibilities

belonging to both federal and provincial levels of government. The Federal Government will make proposals at the appropriate time but will also be ready to receive those of the provinces and to discuss problems openly, taking into account the over-all interest of the country. A first step has already been made by inviting the provinces to a conference on the adoption of a Bill of Rights guaranteeing linguistic and and cultural rights, which could be inserted in the constitution. The Toronto "Confederation of Tomorrow" conference might also give us more precise indications of what the provinces are seeking.

We must improve the mechanisms and the institutions that will permit better coordination between the Federal Government and the Provincial Governments. On this point, there are great possibilities. Until now, the contacts and consultations at different levels have permitted only a partial and not always rational approach to the solution of our problems.

I have been speaking about the basic reality of a country built upon the foundation of two communities, the English-speaking and French-speaking societies of Canada. But I also referred to the "respect for the fundamental rights of individuals and groups" which characterizes Canada. Not only is Canada not monolithic as between English-speaking and French-speaking societies, it is also not monolithic within these societies. It is essential to understand that "English-speaking Canada" is not "English-Canada". Without minimizing the great influence which British institutions and English cultural traditions have played in shaping this country, I want to emphasize that our English-speaking community is a heterogeneous society molded by many indigenous and imported forces.

Canada is growing with the contribution of people from many lands. This is not a peripheral contribution - it is essential to the present configuration and future promise of the Canadian "mosaic". More than a quarter of all Canadians are descended from, or have themselves come from countries other than France or the British Isles. They give a quality to Canada not of one pattern but of kaleidoscopic variation.

The presence of many ethnic groups in Canada has a two-way effect. The country derives benefit from the richness of the gifts which people with varied backgrounds give to Canada. For their part, our citizens of non-British and non-French stock are able to express their group personality freely within a bilingual framework. The narrow belief that all the ethnic minorities in Canada should be and would be automatically assimilated culturally into a homogeneous society has passed away - I would add, unmourned. Of course the process of "integration" not "assimilation" continues as New Canadians gradually come to terms with their new environment. But I hope and expect that we shall all continue to profit from the cultural contributions of readily identifiable ethnic groups of diverse origin throughout the country. We must ensure that this is so.

This overview of Canada makes clear the complexity of the problems which we face. No two countries are alike, but most can learn lessons from others in building a nation. In Canada's case, however, I do not think that there are reliable guideposts. A few countries share some of our problems - none share them all - so we must map our own way.

In this Centennial Year we have much of which to be proud - for example, such great achievements as Expo '67. But in

my view our most justifiable source of pride lies in the way in which Canadians are responding to the challenges of national unity. We have not yet found our way - in an evolving society we may never be completely sure that we have found all the answers. But in 1967, I believe that most Canadians are posing the right questions and, more important, are exhibiting a willingness and a desire to work out a new national equilibrium which will reflect new realities.

National unity at home is the prerequisite for a strong and influential foreign policy abroad. A country which is divided in its domestic affairs, which does not appear to be managing its internal problems with intelligence and foresight, is unlikely to be successful in furthering its international interests. Up to now Canada has had a strong international voice; we must continue to ensure that this voice reflects a country which is confident at home and knows what it wants to do abroad.

The international benefits of national unity as we are building it in Canada, are impressive. Our debate at home on the inter-relationships of different communities, gives us an insight into the relationships of other peoples and countries. We understand the complexities of operating a federal system. In addition, our English-speaking and French-speaking orientations give us an opportunity to foster close links with many more areas than would have been the case had our society been monolithic. The presence of groups with varied ethnic origins expands our opportunities to develop our relations with the homelands of our ancestors.

Some people would even argue that the success which we may have in dealing with the question of national unity in Canada

could be an example for other countries whose populations are also heterogeneous and <sup>could</sup> add to our international prestige.

It is also true that the economics of national unity have their effect on international relations. The Canadian economy will not be expanding and healthy unless the political, economic and social relationships of our regions, communities and cultures are harmonious. And without a healthy economy, we shall not be able to play our full part abroad in such vital areas as international development assistance.

The conclusion is that for international as well as domestic reasons, national unity in its uniquely Canadian form must be preserved and strengthened. Canadians recognize the problems; in the great majority they accept the new realities; and they are prepared to devote all the effort needed to adapt the formulae of our first one hundred years to the requirements of the future.

Over and above any political or constitutional changes which might be needed, we must think of one objective only: to make Canada work successfully as one country. We must make sure that all individuals and groups have an equal chance in Canada; we must make sure that the idea of Canada commands the loyalty and dedication of all Canadians. It can be done; it is a question of will - and I know that we have that will.