

Statement

Secretary of
State for
External Affairs



Déclaration

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

"THE CHALLENGE BEYOND MEECH"

NOTES FOR A SPEECH

BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,

AT A FUNDRAISER DINNER HELD AT

THE MISSISSAUGA GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB

TORONTO

June 11, 1990.

This has been a year of dramatic changes in world history.

The Berlin wall is now rubble;

The Iron Curtain is down;

The Eastern Bloc is a bloc no more;

The Cold War is over;

Throughout Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia, democracy and the free market are making new converts and securing new ventures;

Nelson Mandela is free, and discussions to end apartheid are underway.

Canadians are involved in those changes - excited by them. In some cases, we have been fighting for those reforms for years - helping bring dissidents like Danylo Shumuk out of Soviet prisons; using our embassies to encourage Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia, and Solidarity in Poland - leading the Commonwealth in the fight against apartheid. And, having helped to end old systems, we are also helping to build new ones, systems that will enshrine freedom and be strong enough to endure.

One in ten Canadians has origins behind what used to be the Iron Curtain, and Canada is mounting a major program to build democratic institutions and market economies in Eastern and Central Europe. The Prime Minister has played a leading role in securing observer status for the Soviet Union at the GATT, and in closing the gap between Soviet leaders and the leaders of the G-7 economies and of NATO. In South Africa, we have launched a program to ensure that, in the negotiations to end apartheid, both sides have the best legal and constitutional expertise.

But we Canadians have also, in our distinct way, made some history of our own.

If Eastern Europe and South Africa demonstrate that bad systems fail and fall apart, we Canadians are demonstrating that good systems work, when there is a will to make them work.

While the First Ministers were enjoying one another's company for seven days and seven nights, I spent two days in separate meetings with the Foreign Ministers of NATO and the Helsinki process. That was a period in the week when it looked like the Meech Lake discussions might fail. I spoke of our problems to Ministers from Hungary, Germany, Romania, the United States, the United Kingdom, Yugoslavia - and they could not believe that a country as envied and respected as Canada would put itself at risk. And particularly that we would put ourselves at risk over the question of how we deal with different cultures - because that is the signature of Canada, the success that is admired around the world, the success that new governments in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union and a united Germany, and a new South Africa, will want to copy. Paul Desmarais said the other day that he wished Canadians would show as much respect for our extraordinary country as foreigners do.

And then, late on Saturday night, after a week of profound emotion and extraordinary skill, Canada's eleven First Ministers signed the Meech Lake Accord, brought Quebec fully into the Canadian constitutional family, set an agenda for other change, and proved that the skills of compromise and common sense, which the world admires in Canada, still prevail.

I want to focus on two aspects of that process.

The first is a tribute - to the qualities which make this nation work, and the people who apply those qualities with such skill. It is popular to criticize conciliators - and to celebrate the headstrong or the stubborn. Yet no one here would want a Rambo to run your family, or your business, or your country. In fact, for the last year in the world, we have welcomed the end of regimes which ruled through fiat or through force. Those qualities of conciliation are Canada's trademark, and they have never been more evident than in the last week. I was proud of my own Premier, Don Getty, who was a rock through all that tumult. But the man who made it work, was the man at the head of the table. Brian Mulroney was at his best, and proved that toughness and conciliation can go hand in hand.

But the other reality of the Meech Lake debate is that it revealed a discontent - a Canadian malaise - that should alert us to other real problems in the Canadian community. The Meech Lake Accord is not perfect, as no constitutional arrangement is perfect. But it is not so imperfect that it should have generated the anger and the fear that have scarred Canada in this last year. Meech Lake became a lightning rod for grievances across Canada, people who agreed on little else found common cause against Meech Lake. I think we have to ask ourselves why that happened, and what it means we must do now.

For context, let me return to what is happening in the rest of the world. There are profound changes - Europe, whose nation-states fought one another for centuries, is coming together in one massive Common market, that increasingly involves social and political integration.

Asia is an economic powerhouse - modern, innovative, able to apply its population and its power to shape a world that Europe and the Americas once thought it controlled.

In Europe, as the old tensions of the Cold War disappear, new tensions of nationalism arise. Everywhere, the rush of change excites extreme responses - in some religions, in some regions, among people everywhere who feel threatened. Naturally, Canada is not immune to that.

I think we have reached the stage, as a country, where we have to examine some basic assumptions about ourselves. The country has changed more quickly than we have adapted; and, now that Meech Lake has made our constitutional family whole, we have to take a fresh look at who we are as a country, and what we want to become.

Let me offer some observations that might stimulate that process.

In the 1980 referendum in Quebec, the crucial question asked by individual Quebecers was "Why should I leave Canada?".

But before last week's meetings on Meech Lake, a more common question was: "Why should I stay in Canada?".

Those different questions reflect three realities that have changed.

The first is an exciting and positive change; it is the assertion of French-Canadian confidence and pride, the reality that in so many walks of life Quebec is not just distinct, but distinguished. It is an achievement which speaks to Quebec's accomplishments not in comparison to the rest of Canada but to the rest of the world.

Whether it is in business or the arts or the professions, the Quebec achievement is undeniable. Denis Arcand's films have been twice nominated for Best Foreign Film by the Academy Awards. Anne Hébert has won one of the premiere international literary awards. Le Cirque du Soleil draws SRO audiences and rave reviews on Broadway and in Los Angeles.

And in business, Bernard Lamarre of Lavalin has won a contract to build Bangkok's subway system. Laurent Beaudoin of Bombardier has won a contract to rebuild New York City's train system and a billion dollar contract to construct the European Airbus. The Power Corporation, Caisses Populaires Desjardins and Papiers Cascades are now major corporate players, not just in Quebec, and not just in Canada, but throughout this continent and around the world.

In a Canadian society which is preoccupied with calling itself "world class", these multiple achievements by Quebec stand on their own, more eloquent than any politician's rhetoric or any poet's dreams.

That is one reality, a reality which is worthy of praise and pride. But there is a second reality. And that is the new ugliness towards Quebec, symbolized by that bitter minority in Brockville wiping their feet on the Fleur de Lys. That second reality is disturbing both for what it is and for the false signal to Quebec that this is a national trend and not just an isolated spasm.

And there is a third reality, much less celebrated, but of even greater concern. And that is the decline in pride and identity in what we loosely call "English Canada".

Let me put that in the context of my own province of Alberta. And let me put aside, for a moment, the fact that this Government implemented an agenda that responded to what Albertans said they wanted - an end to FIRA; an end to the National Energy Program; the privatization of PetroCanada; fairer freight rates; and a Free Trade Agreement, to mention only a few. Put aside

also the reasonable assumption that three Alberta MPs - the Deputy Prime Minister, and I, and the Government House Leader, Harvie André have some influence on the Government's priorities. Despite these incontestable realities, Albertans do not feel part of their national government. There is a widespread assumption that the national government serves someone else's interests. That perception is particularly powerful in western Canada - where whole political careers are devoted to propagating it - but it exists, to some degree, everywhere. Our national institutions are not seen as relevant to the problems people think are important.

Fewer and fewer Canadians trust the institutions which used to glue the country together - whether it is Parliament, political parties, businesses or the Church. The sense of national community is giving way to a cacophony of special interests whose extreme agendas are defined by their narrowness, and by an unwillingness to compromise with others.

The point is this. If Canada is to be an identity, and not just an address, we will have to define our country in terms larger than our immediate or personal interests. The fault is not in the interest groups. They quite properly pursue their particular concerns. The fault is in our national institutions which do not lift and hold Canadians to a larger vision.

That is a very serious problem. It affects politics, it affects journalism, it affects government, it affects business, it affects our universities.

And perhaps most importantly, it affects that small group of Canadians who traditionally have sought to define the national identity and the national interest. That is particularly true of writers, artists and intellectuals outside Quebec.

The Meech Lake controversy was unique in the relative absence of these Canadians from that national debate. It has been striking that as Quebec's separation loomed far more seriously than in 1980, the traditional custodians of English-Canadian identity were largely mute. The fight was left to politicians and citizens with fax machines. The traditional custodians of the English-Canadian identity were either silent or opposed to an Accord which would bring Quebec back to the constitutional family. As a symptom of the spiritual atrophy of Canada outside of Quebec, this is a very serious sign.

Why has that happened? Why, in the process of constantly glaring at Quebec, does the rest of Canada seem to have lost its own sense of self? Why does it sometimes seem that it is not Quebec separating from Canada that is the issue, but the rest of Canada separating from each other and from our own past?

Part of the explanation is that we do not realize what we have become. And in not realizing this, we have allowed the nation to drift, holding on to old illusions which no longer apply and neglecting to build upon the new reality which is Canada and the new world in which we survive and prosper.

I believe we have all based our assumptions about Canada on facts which have changed. Our country has changed, but our vision of it hasn't, and often our institutions haven't. Consider some examples.

In 1955, over 80% of immigrants to Canada came from Europe or the United States. In 1988, that was down to 29%. 43% of our immigrants came from Asia. 14% came from Central and South America. And 14% came from Africa and the Middle East. For 12 years, we have drawn more immigrants from Asia than from Europe and that is reflected in the daily life of most of our communities. Yet there are only two people from visible minorities in the House of Commons, and a disproportionately low percentage in positions of leadership in business and government. In some voluntary and community fields the performance is better, but we are still running a diverse society on assumptions that time has passed by.

In 1960, 28% of Canadian women worked outside the home. In 1989, that figure had risen to over 58%. Discrimination against women remains systemic and strong. In my own Department of External Affairs, I am ashamed to admit that during the last round of appointments to executive level positions, only 2 of the 30 promotions to that level were women. In the entire history of Canadian diplomatic representation in the major "Group of Seven" countries, the only woman ever to serve as Head of Post was Jean Wadds in London. The abortion and childcare debates in Canada have reflected a sharp division between male and female attitudes. That division also arises on other important questions, including attitudes to issues of war and peace. Our national institutions simply do not reflect our population.

Those facts report a failure of our institutions to mirror the new social reality of Canada. There is another type of failure, a failure to recognize the nature of our prosperity and hence the requirements for success in the future.

Some Canadians, including prominent politicians, continue to behave as if we had a closed economy, as if the Canadian economy was not tied to trade and to the wider world. 30% of the Canadian economy is now dependent on trade. That represents 2.4 million direct jobs. For Canada, trade is not an option; it is our life blood.

Throughout the 1970s, there was wonderful rhetoric from Canadian leaders about Canada's membership in the global village. But those same leaders went out and put up walls around Canada. They invented a Foreign Investment Review Agency and a National Energy Program. They incurred a horrendous level of debt. They had reasons for these actions and I will not dispute the sincerity of their motives, but they behaved as if Canada could stand apart from the changes that were transforming the world.

Those attitudes are still around. You find them in debates about international trade. Throughout the debate over the Free-Trade Agreement, critics told the Government that we should rely on the GATT, the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, rather than on a Free-Trade Agreement. But in recent months, when the GATT has ruled against Canada - on salmon

and herring and on wine - these same critics said "Ignore the GATT. Stand up for Canada. Don't let the GATT grab Canadian jobs." These Canadians are trapped in an old illusion, an old assumption which no longer applies. We cannot pick and choose our moments of international obligation. We can't exempt ourselves from international rules when we don't like the rulings. Those rules aren't meant to be broken.

Let's look at another economic fact and another old assumption that we have to get rid of. We still tend to see ourselves as a nation of factories and farms. But in 1988, the agricultural sector accounted for only 3.6% of jobs in Canada. And the manufacturing sector amounted to 25%. Over 70% of the Canadian employment came from the service sector. That is an economic transformation of immense significance.

Yet look at the attitudes to the new federal sales tax. The existing sales tax - on manufactured goods - was predicated on an economy dominated by manufacturing. That domination no longer exists. If the Government is to be able to raise the revenue to reduce the deficit and fund programs, the sales tax it applies must reflect the economy of the country. So the GST lowers the rate and widens the coverage to include the service sector.

That seems to me to be straightforward. Of course, no one likes taxes. Politicians are seldom elected because of their stand on taxes unless that stand is to abolish them. But if taxes have to exist - to fund programs, to pay down the deficit - let's have taxes that make sense, taxes that reflect the changing Canadian economy. To preserve a tax which is based on a shrinking manufacturing sector, and to preserve a tax which punishes Canadian traders when Canada is a trading nation is ridiculous. Yet the old illusions and old assumptions stand in the way of realism and common sense.

Whether it is the economic area or the area of linguistic rights or race relations, new attitudes and new perspectives are struggling to be reflected fairly. But at the same time, old attitudes sense that they are under assault and a vigorous rear-guard is launched. That is why the Association for the Protection of English in Canada has burst back into the CBC's eager spotlight. That is why political parties have been formed around the theme of "heritage".

I was at a NATO meeting in Tumberry, Scotland, 5 days ago. There, the British Foreign Secretary, talking about NATO said: "We have to be custodians of what we have accomplished, but we also have to be reformers." I sent him a note saying "In Canada, we call that being a Progressive Conservative" - and the need for that instinct in Canada has never been greater.

To know where we must go, we must know where we are and where we have come from. We can never forget that the existence of this country was not a given. That our history has been a continuous act of affirmation. That the building of Canada was a task accomplished against all odds - geographic, economic, demographic. That tending this community called Canada requires care. That it will not tolerate abandon. Nor will it tolerate intolerance. Canada won't work if we live in two solitudes - or ten or a hundred. The only way to avoid that is to get to know

the society we are and to set aside nostalgia for what we once were - or think we once were. There are hundreds of thousands of Canadians who deride their National Capital without ever having seen the Peace Tower. There are still more who deride Quebecers without having ever stepped inside that province and talked to its citizens. And there are central Canadians - so many of them - who have never wandered west of the Manitoba border as they contemplate yet another trip to Miami, London or New York. It is one thing to disagree with other Canadians. It is another thing to have never met them and to have never known their neighbourhoods.

There is a disturbing feature which pervades our national psych . It is a profound complacency, an attitude which says that the good life we have enjoyed will continue. But there is nothing automatic about our good luck - nothing guaranteed. My family has worked hard in Alberta for three generations, and prospered there. But we did not put the oil in the ground, and no one can guarantee that our children will inherit a kingdom so peacable as that in which we grew up. The world has known other serene communities that came apart when anger and antagonism became gradually contagious. And the world has known economies that were once rich and have become impoverished through complacency and inaction.

It would be a tragedy to let that happen here.

The new clich  is that Canada is a solution looking for a problem. In fact, we have problems, serious in their context, but we also have a remarkable record of success - of solutions.

We have to put an end to Canadian complacency.

We to have to step erecting walls around each other while around the world walls are being torn down each day.

We must look beyond the legal Constitution and focus on how we build a diverse dynamic contemporary nation.

We must start to define ourselves by what we are, and what we can become.

And we must learn to dream again - to set our sights in what this extraordinary country can become in a mould of so much challenge and promise.

The passions and skill that caused Meech Lake to be signed are proof that we care about this extraordinary country. But the anger that debate evoked demonstrates the need to renew a sense of Canadian goals and purpose - to define our national community as we are today, as we can become - diverse, tolerant, talented, respecting ourselves as much as others do.