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## Understanding French Canada

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MR. VIAU: — Mr. Chairman, Gentlemen, I thank you for your kind words Mr. Chairman. What you have said revives my courage because I think that I was very bold in accepting an invitation to present to so distinguished a gathering my first public address in English.

I know by tradition that our English compatriots are always generous in hearing what their partners, the Canadians of French descent, have to say concerning that majestic enterprise which is called Canadian democracy.

*Before entering on my subject* I wish to state that I do not *represent anyone today*, that I am not speaking officially, nor am I delegated by any group, although I sincerely believe my opinions are shared by a large group of Canadians of my generation.

I speak as a free Canadian who is anxious to contribute towards making his country a quiet, peaceful and harmonious place to live in.

I speak as one who thinks that it is the imperative duty of all men of good will to endeavour to counteract a tendency that is at present taking place by the expression of narrow views. Perhaps the areas are limited in which the idea is expressed but it makes a strong appeal to many. I refer to racial fanaticism.

Truth and fanaticism cannot be professed with the same means and in the same fashion. I think fanaticism can merely be expressed today in Canada in closed quarters, while truth, fortunately, can be preached and ventilated at large.

This is why, after having expressed my ideas in my own province in French, I feel perfectly free to come to you with a translation of these ideas. In doing so I ask you kindly to excuse any inaccuracies of grammar or faults in delivery knowing that the principles and convictions expressed are sincere and aim at a loyal end.

My remarks this afternoon, are entitled: "For or Against the English?" a title which may perhaps disturb some people after what has been said in some circles. Truth to tell, it is a delicate subject, but I believe it opportune to deal with it at present, and perhaps I have put into the matter much sentiment, and not a little of my heart. I am not speaking for the purpose of arousing passion or bitterness in the medley of opinions. I believe that, in a small way, I am pleading the cause of national peace at an opportune time preceding the visit of our Most Gracious Sovereigns, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth.

My topic grew from a study of a volume telling of the Rouen Congress, the French Weekly Social gatherings. This Congress had as its theme: "Conflicts of Civilization." Therein it was stated that: "The proper role of civilization is to be a product of reason expressing itself in all manifestations of life. Therein, speaking descriptively, civilization finds its expression in language, in monuments, in institutions and in mental effort. This gives to civilization both its originality and its contrasts."

"Such a civilization is a particular one, resting upon itself, jealous of guarding its own characteristics, in love with the past rather than especially interested in outside development."

"Another civilization tends to spread itself beyond its borders, to broaden out, and to conquer. Nevertheless, many civilizations may co-exist without mutual contact and mutual knowledge."

"It even happens that at times the first inclination is to run away from each other, without, however, renouncing altogether the advantage of a certain exchange of ideas. We have passed this stage. Civilizations today no longer ignore each other, but penetrate one into the other. In a century of navigation, railways, automobiles, telephones,

aviation, and radio, civilizations cannot remain apart. All men meet, all civilizations are penetrable. No nation is airtight against another. The world has become a collective body. Men more and more come closer to each other, and the same with their manner of living."

"Can it be said though that there is a common humanity?"

I wish to apply this to the conflicts of civilization which exist in this country. Looking truth in the face, can we say that clashes and the wounds of civilization do not exist among the English and French races here? They have existed before, we still have them occasionally, and if we do not prevent it, they will come tomorrow. It is therefore imperative that we seek the causes of these clashes and conflicts so as to learn the necessary lessons, and thus prepare for less difficult hours in the future. It is necessary to understand these conflicts and remedy them as rapidly as possible so as to improve our mutual relations. What may be repaired today may become irreparable tomorrow.

Perhaps it is necessary to go back into history in order to understand the conflicts of Canadians of English origin and Canadians of French origin, which means examining the evolution of our two races on Canadian soil. However, this is impossible in a short talk, and furthermore our history is known to all.

It was Lucien Romier who wrote in his book "Nation and Civilization:"

"There arrives at times between peoples that which frequently happens between individuals. There are quarrels. War comes not to settle an immediate question, but to satiate the quarrels and hatreds which by many are termed hereditary. This cruel play may have had a meaning in some way natural when the peoples grouped as tribes, herded together and, engrossed with themselves, lives in a jealous and enclosed complete autonomy. But today, communications are intense and rapid, and influences, sentiments and ideas circulate between nations and become mingled in a growing complexity. It is only by artificial stimulation that it is possible to excite among peoples and

individuals animosities which recall the hatreds of the hamlets or clans."

Must we not confess that most of the men of my generation at an early age, acquired by artificial stimulation grave prejudices against one race or the other, merely because of the method of teaching history which they received? I realize that the intentions of many are good. It is a matter of exalting the high lights of our history for the purpose of developing a particular type of patriotism. I question, however, whether this can be done without raising young Canadians who heartily detest each other at an early age. The teaching of history is not carried out in a manner to create a unified Canadian mentality. It is not done in a manner to give young people the state of mind that, in this domain as in others, they may put into practice the teachings of charity, justice, goodness, and generosity towards which religion directs us. Among the Catholics as among the Protestants, the teaching of biased form of history tends to exalt French or English nationalism in such a way that it hinders at the commencement the possibility of friendly relations with the young of the other race. This means that youth is often torn between charity, justice, goodness and other generous attitudes and what is presented to him as a patriotic duty. The result is that the young man instead of building for the purpose of making a success of his life, and of helping his country, nourishes the idea of working against someone and against something.

Often he works more to diminish the power of the other group than does to strengthen his own.

Does not this mean that the effort is to paralyze or to impede as much as possible rather than to work for the betterment of the whole?

Happily, matters tend to correct themselves because of the obligatory daily contacts, and the exchange of opinions. These permit modifications of the impressions which have been received and help one to form a more personal judgment. But this requires years of effort and experience, to counterbalance the years that have been lost.

When the young man has lived for a short time in the midst of his compatriots of the English language, or of the

French language when he has travelled in the other provinces, crossed the ocean and seen England and France, he will find that his ideas have changed more rapidly than those of others who have not had the privilege of such opportunities.

He will observe that if his ancestors had to suffer adversity, their descendants are men like himself, living in an atmosphere much like his own, having the same cares, the same preoccupations, the same responsibilities, and suffering from the same anxieties concerning the security of their family, and the future welfare of their children.

He will find that those in other lands have little time to devote to the quarrels of other days, that they do not seek to prolong strife down the trail of history for the sole purpose of bringing about a futile revenge. He will find that his confreres of another race are no more wicked than himself, and no more selfish than necessary. Gradually the spirit of friendliness will develop.

He would consider that if the ancestors of his fellow citizens of another race have committed errors, because of the circumstances, of the times in which they lived, and of the orders which they had to execute, the acts of his own ancestors have not always been glorious and generous.

Later on, this young man will find his attitude sensibly altered. The time will come when he will cease to think of his own importance and when he will be obliged to abandon the attitudes which perpetuate the quarrels of history, when his thoughts must be given to his home and his children, and when his concern turns not on yesterday but on tomorrow. A friend of mine in Quebec expressed this thought in saying: "Cessons d'être les fils de nos pères pour devenir les pères de nos fils," which may be translated: "Let's cease being the sons of our fathers to become the fathers of our sons." This young man will then think not of the past but of the future of his compatriots.

Facing such realities, the question will not be whether the French-Canadian will not ask "if he is for or against the French." Both will come to the conclusion, by the force of circumstances, that the issue is not whether he is for or against, but that life placed him in company *with* someone.

One will find that life has placed him on Canadian territory with a group of French Canadians (who have no wish to disappear). The other will find that life has placed him with an important group of Canadians of English origin, who are doing well, and that both are together on the same soil, living in the same atmosphere, with pretty well the same problems, under the folds of the same flag, and the sovereignty of the same King.

If either knows the facts and has a sense of responsibility he must take account of this situation and view his responsibilities broadly if he is called upon to play a part in affairs, to speak in public, to exercise influence upon public opinion or act for the public service of Canada.

Those on whom lies the responsibility for leading French Canada today are not defeatists. We have no intention of abandoning our legitimate ambitions or ideals. We wish, and work at all times as far as we can to aid in bringing about the realization of those ambitions and ideals. What we object to is their realization by methods of force, disparagement, spite, sectarianism and parish pump politics. Force is not in itself a creative power, but is merely a vehicle, and requires some form of spiritual to attain reasonable purposes.

We all understand that for individuals of any ethnical group; it is sad to note slowness in their educational, social, economic and political development. We all know that it is sad to note that such a development, the features of which we held as ideals in the days of our youth, is at times retarded by the attitude of others, when not hampered and made almost useless by the more rapid and better organized evolution who is often considered as an enemy whereas he is only an active competitor.

Sentiments of reaction, of discontent, and at times of discouragement may be provoked when a race has worked during three centuries to raise large families, to create little holdings, under conditions often painful, while alongside are his neighbors with smaller families which cost less, and where prosperity reigns. But is not all this very human, and is it not going on throughout the world? Is this not true of all individuals, of all groups of the human race?

I know that you all understand that to seek to create enterprises under handicaps is at all times to lead to a sentiment of revolt, discouragement and envy. Often it appears vain to try to set up enterprises with insufficient capital, rudimentary means of organization, or in the absence of administrative power, or lack of financial assistance, whereas on the other side there is an economic formation of long standing, with durable political trumps, where there is no lack of money, and there exists a strong spirit of collaboration.

In some quarters some extremists consider us as backward, as priest-ridden, and rebel against our traditionalism, and our slow reactions in the face of reforms and transformations.

Fortunately they are the exception and I know that the majority of our co-citizens of the English language share the opinion of Mr. Leslie Roberts as to the cooperation we may hope for on their part. In an article published May 1, 1938 in the *Montrealer* he said: "We are not really an unreasonable race, although we are stubborn. Once the knowledge filters into the unexercised crannies of our minds that certain items are essential to the continuity of comity, we are good givers, likely to be more generous because giving has been too long delayed, and we shall want to make amends for what may seem to be churlish behaviour. Bigotry is not unknown amongst us, of course, and bigotry usually has much to do with the early phases of all such clashes, simply because the bigots are organized to set up a first rate clack. That has always been the trouble with the French-English debate, for each side has bigots in abundance. Nowadays, however the tendency is growing for men of good will to take hold. If our French-Canadian friends will only be patient with us there are signs in the skies that we may be able to reach a lasting *bonne entente*, for, on the whole, the English Canadian is not a difficult fellow provided he can be convinced he is not being pushed around."

Excuse this quotation, I believe it sheds light and adds support to my thesis.

I said there were reasons for discontent on both sides.

Using the means at its disposal, one of the parties may adopt the attitude of ignoring the other by isolating itself and entrenching itself in its own back yard. The other, less independent in fortune, and more uneasy as to its future, naturally directs itself to movements of ultra-nationalism as the sole means possible for restoration and success. It is by analysing the position of the other fellow that one can establish the responsibility of each party, and this leads us to dig more deeply into our common constitution and so to evaluate the contribution of each. There is for instance the adding up of the monies paid since 1867 to the federal government, and it is found that of the \$13,265,000,000 that has been paid in annual taxes to the federal treasury, towards which the Canadians of the French language have paid some three or four billions, the Province of Quebec may seem to have received little in the way of upbuilding in an economic way. Naturally attention is then given in other directions to establish comparisons. The result is that it is believed that injustice has been done.

There is examination, also, of the central administrative organization with this spirit of analysis and criticism with the idea that it is not in the spirit of the contract to give a large share on one side and little on the other when it was understood that a collaboration was established on a basis proportional to population. This same spirit would also show that in this province of Ontario, 10,700 miles of railway were built to a large extent at the cost of the state while in Quebec there are only 4,800 miles. Similarly one notes that 320 branches of the English Canadian banks operate freely in the province of Quebec, with the collaboration of French Canadians, while in this province, French Canadian banks opening their doors each day still find themselves doing business in centres almost exclusively French and numbering only about 24. This same national spirit also observes that close to 90% of the 115 millions of dollars paid annually in our province in Insurance premiums goes to companies which have very few French Canadians on their Boards of Directors, and that their capital investments are often made outside the limits of the Province.

All these things, and many others which I have not the time to enumerate, added to my earlier statements concerning the education of youth and the evils we are subjected to today, result in discontent and cause from time to time in certain quarters outbursts of protest. The result is that when there is a question of national interest at stake there is often absence of unanimity, and often absence of collaboration, when there is not contradiction and absolute opposition.

As you notice, I am but opening the problem. To go more fully into the matter would require hours of prudent pleading. I cannot for the moment go further with this delicate problem, but I know that this important question of occasional conflicts between the two races interests us all and that you will complete what I have said by invoking memories of our common life in Canada, a life which I think has been rather congenial on the whole because of the marriage of reason on Canadian soil of the English and French races.

Where and how will we find the solution of the conflicts between the two civilizations, each with a different language and at times of religion and with disproportionate fields and means for action? How are we to prepare their parallel development in understanding and union? How are we to work together like a company, like a household without hurting and wounding? What should be done?

I think we all know what should be done. It can be seen and understood when one reaches a certain age, when one has reached a certain altitude on the ladder of life, where the elevation permits us to see a wider horizon, and to understand all the space of our national existence—its past, present, and future.

Present generations of England and France have freely forgotten the fights of the generations of yesterday. During the war of 1914 the French-English alliance, begun with the Crimean war in 1854, and completed by the entente cordiale of 1903 after the commercial treaty of 1862, was submitted to its first great test. Following this ordeal the two nations became linked in a duality of collaborative energies which permits today each one to act as an entity, but to move forward in cooperation, hand in hand.

When John Bull and Marianne married, a marriage which is one of reason rather than of love, you will agree that this elegant couple made an impression on the world. As they go forward they will spread about them much glory and happiness. As a result of reciprocal attention and an ever vigilant delicacy there will be developed between the couple a friendship which is already taking on the strong and durable character of cordiality and affection. This alliance has astonished the world, and made peace possible last September. Chamberlain and Daladier will go down in history as moderators and powerful peacemakers.

Cartoonists have already presented us with the picture of this elegant couple walking arm in arm. Here in Canada they have always pictured the Canadian, more especially the English Canadian, as a farmer and called him Jack Canuck. Would it not be logical, then to consider Jack Canuck as the son of John Bull and Maria Chapdelaine, or Madeleine de Vercheres, as your fancy dictates, symbolizing the French population of Canada, as the happy daughter of Marianne.

You foresee already what this would bring about, the logical outcome of the entente cordiale of John Bull and Marianne. The alliance of Jack Canuck and Maria Chapdelaine can already be an official marriage, the ideals of which for the future will do away with the uneasiness, pre-occupations and hatreds of the past.

Is this possible? It must be for the salvation of us all. I believe it is so already, for the two sides are coming closer together. Clubs such as yours do an admirable work in this respect, and certain writings and books accentuate this movement for closer relations.

It is a patriotic work for French Canadians to study and understand their English compatriots, and it is a patriotic work for our English compatriots to seek to understand us, first through contacts, and then by knowledge of the works of their own people on us. I mention in passing the two volumes of Bovey: *Le Canadien*, and *The French Canadian Today*.

With this marriage of reason we will not have, in theory, rights to be established, since this marriage will provide separation of property, each administering his own, each

possessing full liberty of action and all freedom. True the couple are unequal in material wealth, but I believe they will be in unity when it is a matter of peace, their intentions as to progress, and their generous ambitions for their children. This common ideal is essential to conjugal happiness.

Let our English compatriots continue to develop as brilliantly as they do. Maria Chapdelaine has no objection so long as it does not mean detriment to her own patrimony and her personal future. Furthermore, has she not the right to vote, and can she not plead before the courts of justice in her own name? By way of added measure Jack Canuck will be proud of her because she has fine manners, because she is a person of distinction and has numerous other qualities. She even possesses virtues of which he will be pleased to boast. Jack Canuck should encourage her to maintain her language, to fortify her faith when need be, to let her defend herself against subversive doctrines with all the means at her disposal. He should also permit her to work to realize her ambitions. Let him assist her, even with generosity, to realize her aspirations as to the future of her children. Let him permit her to act in full liberty in all her domains, such as social, educational, political and economic. Let him understand that Maria wishes to grow and to develop without restrictions, so that she herself may also give her share of what is necessary for the joy and happiness of the Canadian people. It is with this conception of parallel development of our two destinies that I foresee a form of union, not unity, which will make possible national security. Therein I find the solution of the conflict of our two civilizations, and possible national progress. As far as we are concerned I may say that if in the past we had more willingness that effective preparedness for cooperation and association with you, today we have just as much of both, and are eager to begin operations in earnest.

Looking at the matter from a broad viewpoint, do you not believe that this alliance, or marriage of reason has existed for a long time? We have been living in this state of marriage for more than a century without realizing the fact. The beginning of our common life dates from the time of our common anxieties, from the time of our fears and collective apprehensions. Our common life goes back

to the time when we had to defend our homes, our country and our flag. It does not date back to the conquest when it was a matter of two great European countries battling over a land we already considered as ours. The origin of this marriage of Jack Canuck and Maria Chapdelaine dates back to the day when we had to meet mutual obligations and trials. Doubtless the reason was necessity, but afterwards there flowed feelings of friendship, a more solid sense of sympathy and the beginning of a Canadian nationhood. There have been in the history of our civil fights, of those for our claims, both in Quebec and in the sister provinces—facts which smack of the heroic and which we cannot ignore, and we cannot but reciprocally congratulate each other. Certain articles in certain Canadian newspapers do not trouble our conscience because we know that our forefathers in 1812 were there on our frontiers side by side with their English speaking compatriots (the highlanders from Glengarry for instance) to defend Canadian Territory. They fought for each others homes. It was there that the first links of friendship were forged between Maria Chapdelaine and Jack Canuck. It was there that the hand was given and the fight undertaken for our survival. The year of 1812 is one that stands out as one of the great historic beginnings of collaboration—when we suffered in common the miseries of war and shared jointly the greatness of victory.

If our loyalty is at times doubted in some quarters where there is lack of knowledge of the actual facts, we, the French Canadians have never doubted it because we have been guided by a loyalty that can be proven by acts and deeds.

In proof of what I have said in this matter I know of no more convincing document than the mandate of Rev. Father Roux, vicar general of the diocese of Quebec for the parish of Montreal, issued on the occasion with the war with the United States in 1812. In it he said: "If there be need to excite your martial ardor, we would recall to you the bravery of your ancestors, always ready to rush to battle against the enemies of their King. We would recall to you all the interests which concern you; you have your goods to defend, your liberty to safeguard; and what should concern you, in your proud souls, you have to maintain

your honor, and perhaps the honor of your wives and daughters, and, above all, the honor of your religion which would be greatly humiliated if you were to fail to follow the banners of your King. We would recall to you the force of the power which protects you. It is Great Britain, glorious in its rays of grandeur, alone to the forefront in a tumbling world. It is Great Britain which fights battles only to secure victory, which attacks fortresses only to conquer them; which defends the most feeble countries to make them invincible. Can our mother country which so powerfully protects foreign countries abandon her children? These children which she has never ceased to cover with favors for more than half a century?"

And in terminating he added. "The field of honor on which one falls would be only the ladder on which will mount to the immortal throne the soldier who dies for his God, his Country and his King."

We all know the brilliant feats of arms of the French Canadians in that 1812 war; we all know the glorious day of Chateauguay which sheds lustre on our history. I cite Sir Thomas Chapais: "It would be excessive to attribute to that event the importance of a great battle, but the strategic results make the matter one of capital importance." Chateauguay, he wrote, was the vengeance of the Canadian people, it was the affirmation of our unalterable loyalty and our ardent patriotism. Chateauguay was the heroic illustration of the national mentality which slowly took form under the far sighted direction of our religious and civil chiefs during the period of vicissitudes and struggles from 1763 to 1813.

All this that we had to suffer on the occasion of the invasion of the country we had to suffer again in the great war. Do you believe that after those two glorious events, that after those two cruel trials to which we submitted stoically, that it is not possible for us to understand each other, and hear each other? Let those who doubt it re-read history. Let them meditate on the historic facts.

Yes, we have suffered trials, but trials bring a nation into a form of closer understanding. Trials, far from having broken or weakened our ranks and our spiritual

traditions, have, on the contrary, fortified them. They have enlarged and enriched the hope and promise of a great future.

For or Against the English? As to myself there is no question, on one part or another we are not for or against anyone. We are with someone. We are joined together to continue to live together, to continue to meet the same troubles, to continue to share our happiness and sorrow. Therefore let us work openly together in full frankness, with sincerity, and above all with justice. Perhaps it is in regard to the last thought that we may have the most difficulty in understanding each other, but with goodwill we will come to a happy landing. We will understand each other if we use moderation and good sense in our discussions.

Jack Canuck and Maria Chapdelaine have already enough worry in the House. They have plenty of outside problems to trouble them, problems which have their repercussions on the home itself, so that they dare not risk the danger of panic by threatening each other in a violent manner. Furthermore we know that if our family squabbles broke out it would be a matter of starting all over again, for circumstances would force us to do so. If, by accident, Jack Canuck and Maria Chapdelaine would turn on one another, would not outsiders pay court to one or the other to embitter matters, hamper the possibilities of peace, accentuate the difficulties, and even launch them into brigades distinguished by shirts of different colors and decorations and symbols? What would this bring us except clashes, street fights, ruin and perhaps bloodshed?

Since we have followed the trail of a sad and baneful route in our imaginations, and pictured separation and seen to what ends we would be led, let us have courage to take stock of the evidence. This means taking stock of elementary logic of conviction.

Let us teach our children a history of Canada that will be conciliatory, and, if it be possible the same all over from ocean to ocean. It may be that this national history will have to be drafted by a National Commission composed of representatives from all the provinces. This is an aim

which I humbly suggest to all the organizations which work for the success of a Canadian Union.

Let us begin at once on both sides to observe finer feelings towards each other, to pardon each others' offences, to forget the errors of other days, including therein the grave faults which we have attributed to our adversaries of other days.

On the whole there is little we do not share in common and to an equal degree. The trouble is that we do not know it. Let us seek to move forward together, slowly at first, then speed our pace in the new avenues which will lead to new heights, which we all wish, whether we be Canadians of French or English origin, to be those of peace, progress and happiness for our two races and our two civilizations.