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NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS

BY

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TO

THE CANADIAN CLUB OF TORONTO

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WHAT PRICE UNITY?

Last Tuesday, I was listening to the press conference of President Nixon who made, to say the least, a surprising eulogy of General de Gaulle. The two great statesmen seem to have agreed on the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of other states.

After such a statement, my outlook on the world was turned upside down. Everything became possible. I could see Judge Thorson teaching French in a small country school; Ralph Cowan and René Lévesque becoming friends under the protective wing of the Omnibus Bill.

It is in the glow of this newfound enthusiasm that I deliver the following thoughts on Canadian unity to you.

Since the birth of Confederation, Canada has produced a great number of what I would call "professionals of Canadian unity". Their intentions were undoubtedly praiseworthy, but their methods were often childish and their lack of realism rather disquieting. We have seen them travelling across the country in the same way as Don Quixote, making use of all modern communication media, to convince the people of the blessings of unity and of the ills of disunity. They were undoubtedly sincere, but most of them did not escape ridicule. They remind me of a doctor who tries to cure his patients by extolling the virtues of health and warning against the evils of sickness.

Unity -- just like peace -- is a fruit that grows only under certain conditions. If these conditions do not exist, there is no point in watering the bush.

This, in my opinion, is the present situation in Canada. I will not say that the proper conditions are entirely absent, but they are in a state of imperfection which really endangers the future of the country.

The main obstacles to Canadian unity are these:

the attitude of Canadians
the relationships between French-speaking and
English-speaking Canadians
the disparities between regions
the problems of Indians, Eskimos and Metis who
so far have not shared fully in the benefits of
the Canadian society
federal-provincial relations.

So long as many French-speaking Canadians view their
English-speaking fellow-countrymen as imperialists and colonizers,
anxious to assimilate them by all means, Operation Unity will not
succeed.

So long as many English-speaking Canadians view their
French-speaking fellow-countrymen as a reactionary, priestridden,
ethnic group anxious to refight the Battle of the Plains of Abraham,
I do not see how we will be able to find a modus vivendi which will
eliminate the present tensions.

So long as the prosperous areas of the country refuse to
understand the problems of the underprivileged areas and to accept
another rule than that of maximum economic efficiency, I do not see
how we will be able to persuade a great majority of the citizens to
work towards common objectives.

So long as the first inhabitants of this country are
considered as second class citizens, we must be rightly concerned
about our future.

So long as a proper balance is not achieved in federal-
provincial relations, the forces of disintegration will profit
from tensions between governments.

In the face of these problems, it is of great importance
that Canadians adopt a realistic, intelligent and generous attitude.

We have a huge country and a small population characterized by linguistic, ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. We must not only be tolerant, but also understanding.

We must accept as a starting point the fact that Canada is a more expensive country to administer, on a per capita basis than, for example, the United States. The building of a railroad from Halifax to Vancouver may be compared, physically, to the building of a railroad from New York to San Francisco, but because of the different population density and the contrasting volume of freight traffic, the operating costs of the two networks cannot be the same. The United States can afford the luxury of several airlines which compete on international air routes but if we attempt to imitate them, we will find that we cannot pay the bills.

What is more, it is undoubtedly more costly to live in a bilingual or multilingual country than in a unilingual one. However, we must determine whether or not economic considerations are to dominate our whole life and all other values. The world would undoubtedly be simpler and there would be fewer conflicts if everyone were white, spoke the same language, practiced the same religion and had the same political ideology. It would certainly be an efficient world but I am sure it would also be very boring.

Finally, Canada would be easier to administer and the standard of living could be raised if we emptied the underprivileged areas and resettled the people in the areas with the best potential for growth. Such an operation could be justified on the purely economic plane, but would certainly be criminal from a human point of view.

We must accept ourselves as we are and build our country from this reality.

If there are some things which we cannot change, either by law or by force, there are others which we can and should change. The political structures, for example, are far from everlasting and must be adjusted to the needs of our times.

If I greatly respect the Fathers of the Confederation, I do not bestow on them virtues they did not have and which they would be the first to decline. They could not solve problems which did not in their time even exist. We, however, must face those problems and find the solutions. I, for one, am more interested in the future of Canada than in its past, although I greatly admire some of the great men of our history and am moved when the important events of the young life of our country are recalled.

This is to say that, for me, no political or state structure has an absolute and unchangeable value. History teaches us that this is an ever-changing field and that political regimes like any human institution, live, change and often die. Our faith in Canadian Confederation has, therefore, nothing of a religious or sacred belief. Confederation is an arrangement based on the general will of the people and it may be changed by the same will. This principle can be denied only by regimes that do not respect the democratic rule. And we live in a democracy.

Any political society is based on a compromise between local, regional, economic, ethnic, linguistic, religious or ideological interests in order to achieve a greater common good. The compromise was sometimes willingly accepted and sometimes imposed. In the latter case, the state of violence either lasted or was replaced by conscious acceptance after the fact.

If all the states that were set up as a result of wars, revolutions or the domination of a majority were to be challenged, the whole world would have to be changed and human beings would be paying an exorbitant price for such futile attempts to change the birth certificates of countries.

We must, therefore, consider the existing situation and see whether the political society in its present form corresponds to the needs of the population. These needs are of various kinds, and surely they must include cultural and language needs. If it

does not meet these needs, it must be changed and even destroyed if it undermines the basic individual freedoms. But to use more or less remote historical events to propose more or less radical changes that do not in the least contribute to the common good and may even be harmful, is to my mind an extremely dangerous game. Historical recrimination has political value only inasmuch as it helps to correct present injustice and to improve society. The historical fabric of all countries contains violations of individual rights, of the rights of ethnic and religious groups and all sorts of discrimination. If they were perpetually to be re-examined we might just as well give up all hopes for peace and progress.

I do question the wisdom of political actions whose only purpose is to open old wounds and to breed hatred against generations who had nothing to do with those events. I am less interested in seeking revenge for past injustice than in correcting today's inequalities.

As I have said, it is more costly to have a bilingual than a unilingual country. But that is the price we must pay if we hope to maintain our unity. When I say a bilingual country, I do not mean that all Canadians should understand and speak the two languages. But unfortunately, that is the interpretation the extremists place on our linguistic policy in order to arouse the resentment of Francophones. The recommendations of the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission in this area are very reasonable and we greatly appreciate the positive attitude taken by several provincial premiers, including Mr. Robarts, for their understanding of the Canadian reality.

Short of some unforeseeable upheavals, North America and even Canada will assuredly be parts of the world where the English language will be predominant, whatever road Quebec may take. But it is essential that the French-speaking people feel at home in this country and find their own reflection in the great national institutions. Taking into account the established rights and

dealing fairly with the unilingual people, it is urgent that governments, and especially the Government of Canada, give services of the same quality to French-speaking and to English-speaking citizens. The City of Ottawa, in particular, must reflect the bilingual character of the country; otherwise, we should not be surprised if French-Canadians look towards the Government of Quebec to solve all their problems.

The ideal of regional development is that Canadians should have good opportunities to earn their living at roughly comparable standards wherever they live from sea to sea.

This, like all other ideals, is not an absolute. It does not mean that opportunities and living standards should be equalised at whatever points in Canada people happen to live. A good degree of mobility, in response to better opportunities in some areas is essential to economic efficiency.

But, while concern for efficiency rules out the pursuit of flat equality, it is equally true that extremes of inequality cannot be accepted in the name of efficiency. Even if it could be shown that the rate of increase of our gross national product would be maximized if (say) half the present population of the Atlantic provinces and eastern Quebec moved to southern Ontario during the next ten years, a national policy to encourage such movement would not be acceptable.

To put the point another way: we are not achieving anything like a just society in a united Canada if opportunities are so disparate that there is heavy and persistent unemployment and under-employment in some regions even when the economy is buoyant, to the point of inflationary pressure, in central Canada. Our unity is not secure if people in some extensive regions have to put up with opportunities and standards well below those of other Canadians, with no escape except by rapid, large-scale migration between regions.

Let me illustrate this with a few figures.

During the last five years for which we have figures, the annual per capita income has averaged \$718 in Newfoundland, while the corresponding figure for Metropolitan Toronto was slightly over \$2,000, that is \$2,076. This is to say that the residents of this region have at their disposal an income which is almost three times that of the average Newfoundlander.

You will probably think that I have chosen two extremes to demonstrate my point. This is not true. Two of the Dominion Bureau of Statistics economic regions actually had average annual per capita income of less than \$500 in the five-year period. These are the Interlake areas of Manitoba where the per capita income was \$488, and the South Shore in Quebec where it was \$493. The comparable figures for Ontario and Canada as a whole were respectively \$1,691 and \$1,382.

This is what I have in mind when I speak of regional disparities.

And this is also why we have proposed the creation of a Department of Regional Economic Expansion. As you are aware, many programs have been implemented in the past in an effort to correct these regional disparities. But, a few figures show that these programs have not substantially helped the poorer regions. From 1961 to 1966, for example, the annual per capita income grew from \$605 to \$910 in Newfoundland; however, during the same period it grew even more in Ontario, from \$1,455 to \$2,057. In other words, one is led to conclude that the economic gap between the rich and poor regions of the country has not been narrowed during the five years.

The goal of regional development is that economic growth should be dispersed widely enough across Canada to bring employment and earnings opportunities in the hitherto slow-growth regions as close as possible to those in the rest of the country without interfering with a high rate of national growth. Our objective is not to weaken the great growth centres of the country, like Toronto,

Montreal or Vancouver. Quite the contrary. Our policy is to create new growth centres in those regions where the growth potential has not been fully realized. Canada needs great, strong cities if it is to develop fully but it also needs a strong economic base from sea to sea. Our policies will be designed to achieve a realistic balance between these needs.

It is unforgivable for a country as prosperous as Canada to allow its Indians, Eskimos and Metis to live in the conditions which they now must face. We must help them as quickly as possible to share in the benefits of the Canadian society. At the present time, they are not first class citizens and they live in poverty conditions which are often revolting.

Until these conditions have been overcome, our Indian, Metis and Eskimo people will not be able to take the place in Canadian life that they have a right to expect. So long as the present inequality persists, it must always remain as a source of discontent and a barrier to the achievement of true Canadian unity.

Poor relations between the province and the federal government aggravate the problems of our society; good relations help to solve them.

We in Ottawa must understand that the provinces are not in the same position as they were in 1867 and that the pattern of relations between the different levels of government must change.

On the other hand, the provinces must not consider Ottawa as their scapegoat by blaming it for their own difficulties and sometimes slackness.

I, therefore, hope the Constitutional Conference which started last year will lead to more harmonious arrangements of functions, to a clearer distribution of responsibilities and, at the same time, to a fairer distribution of revenues.

We will achieve national unity to the extent that we find a solution to the problems I have outlined. If we do not succeed, I sincerely believe the forces of disunity will prevail and will finally break down this vast and beautiful country that is Canada.

But we must pay the price for this unity we all desire. And this price does not consist only of understanding and tolerance. It is also financial. I personally believe that it is not very high in terms of the prize that we can win and to the evils we will avoid by adopting the measures required to convince all Canadians that this whole land is their country.