

NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS TO THE CANADIAN CLUB OF TORONTO

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INTRODUCTION

I want to spend a few minutes explaining the mandate, objectives, style and agenda of the Task Force on Canadian Unity, of which I'm Co-Chairman. No doubt, many of you are now more aware of what we are about as a result of the extensive press coverage we received during the first leg of our tour in Halifax.

I also want to share with you some thoughts on the present crisis, or, perhaps a more creative phrase would be "maturation problems" which Canada faces. More specifically, I want to use as my theme, the cliché phrase, "We're playing for keeps". I want to try to answer the question - Is this just another quarrel between the federal government and the provinces? Is Quebec merely bluffing - Will the situation cure itself? Obviously, neither you nor I can provide complete answers to these questions. Nevertheless, I'm hoping to engage you in the process referred to by the Women's Liberation Movement as "consciousness-raising" - the awakening and heightening of our awareness of the complex situation to which all Canadians should address themselves.

But first, the Task Force itself.

I THE NATURE AND THE COMPOSITION OF THE TASK FORCE

NATURE:

- It was created by an order of the Governor-General on the advice of the Cabinet
- It takes its power to act from the provisions of the Public Inquiries Act, an act of the Parliament of Canada.
- It has no executive powers in that it cannot act to carry out any of its own recommendations
- It reports to the ^{Governor}~~Governor~~-General & the Cabinet i.e. the Government, when its work is complete.
- It is free and independent within its terms of reference and its powers under the Public Inquiries Act and takes no direction from anyone in the carrying out of its functions
- It is of the same type of public-oriented commission - "Berger Commission", "The Plumtre Board", on retail prices, ^{or} the Commission on Metropolitan Toronto which I headed.
- But as the name "task force" suggests, we have taken a position of limited goals in a limited time frame - we hope to complete within a year and a half at the longest
- Other countries have set up similar types of commissions, e.g. the Kilbrandon Commission in Britain on the question of devolution and regionalism - the Servan-Schreiber project on "The future of France".

COMPOSITION

- The Commission consists of 2 national members and 6 regional members: Jean-Luc Pepin, Ottawa, myself

John Robarts, Toronto; Ross Marks, B.C.; Muriel Kovitz, Calgary; Dr. John Evans, Toronto; Solange Chaput-Rolland, Montreal; Gerald Beaudoin, Ottawa; Richard Cashin; St. John's, Nfld.)

N.B.: Two members for Quebec - due to the importance of Quebec in "the debate".

N.B.: All the members are not bilingual - a French-speaking sociologist recently made the point that the B & B Commission was "unrepresentative" because all its members were bilingual! Ours is a representative staff.

II TERMS OF REFERENCE, OR, AS WE CALL IT - MANDATE

- a) "enquire into", "support", "encourage and publicize" "the efforts of the public" particularly non-governmental groups like yours.
- b) "provide" its own "ideas and initiatives" and present them to the public
- c) be a "source of advice to the government"

The Task Force has interpreted the Order-In-Council as follows in defining its own role, in a document we issued on September 1, 1977, and I quote:

"The Task Force will learn a great deal from associations and unity groups as well as interested members of the public. We will give encouragement to those who wish to think about changes which can improve our political, social and economic systems." Many unity groups have told us this is how we might be most useful.

- we will develop "initiatives and ideas"

- We have already informed the public that we are committed to producing a 3rd option for Canada.
- We will pay particular attention to relations with the federal and provincial governments

It's obvious that the Task Force does not feel bound by existing legislation and practices. "Our mandate requires us to advise the government and we will do so but we will also make our views public, not seeking conflict with anybody, but aware that our autonomy is essential to our credibility and usefulness".

To comment further on our mandate, it has been said: "if people agree on objectives, they will sooner or later agree on the means to reach them". The first section of our mandate is designed for the public to express its wishes, and by being a part of the decision-making process, come to support changes. The Halifax Tour has already indicated the readiness and willingness of ordinary Canadians to become involved. The Commission will be in Charlottetown this week and successively in Regina, St. John's, Newfoundland, Vancouver, Edmonton/Calgary, Quebec twice, Toronto, New Brunswick, and Winnipeg, by the first of February next.

- Our role is supplementary to the roles of governments. We are but one instrument among many - as stated in the mandate "a source of advice".

The role of the Task Force is evolutionary. We anticipate that the lifetime of the Task Force should have 3 major periods - with the possibility of some overlapping.

- a) dialogue with groups from coast to coast, receive "presentations", letters, read as many of the publications on unity, ^{as possible} prepare background papers for the public. The Halifax Tour has already confirmed the validity of our approach and the willingness of ordinary Canadians to become involved in the dialogue.
- b) a 3 to 4 month period to study the options - consultations with universities many of whom have their own expert groups in this field to clarify the options for the public - advantages and disadvantages.
- c) decision on recommendations for changes in structures, concepts and attitudes which are required to make our Canadian institutions more consistent with the needs of our times.

A similar evolution should take place in the speeches of the members. This is why I have no options or recommendations to present to you today. We have not reached that position yet.

So much for our objectives.

I should at this stage clarify a few confused notions about our relationship with other groups which have been set up by the government. "The national unity industry" as some journalists have cynically called it.

There is a group headed by Marc Lalonde, the Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations who co-ordinates the Federal-Provincial Office in the Privy Council and the Canadian Unity Information Office. There is also the Prime Minister's adviser on constitutional matters. These are all "civil servants". We are "public servants", interfacing with the public, entitled to freedom of expression and action, responsibly exercised.

Earlier I mentioned the "third option" proposal which we are committed to proposing. What would that include?

1. Substantial "accommodations" in our political system.

We will have to try to answer the question - Can "conventional federal principles solve our unity crisis or will we have to further incorporate other principles"?

The whole range of options will have to be made clear to public opinion. There will be problems in defining the concepts because certain popular concepts "two founding peoples or nations", "special Status" and the independentiste concept of "souverainete-association" are still unclear - with respect to their political and economic consequences, not to mention the emotional connotations of some of these concepts. All these ideas must be made clear so that we know what we are talking about.

2. A "third option" proposal should include elements of psychology (attitudes), sociology (including culture)

and economics as they relate directly to Canadian unity.

What of our style?

To quote from our document of September 1st, "we intend to carry on a conversation with citizens" and "with experts in all disciplines" ... "discussing both old and new concepts".

To quote further, our tone and manners will be reasonable, inquisitive, objective, friendly, optimistic, energetic ... "in the spirit of receptivity and conciliation".

Some of you may be wondering why all this fuss and bother? Crises and tensions are not new in Canada. I heartily agree. The history of federal-provincial relations is the story of the struggles over the division of the national pie. This struggle has been intensified by the gradual spread of rising expectations and dissatisfaction in the public in general, and by the gradual demise of various traditional constitutions and ideologies which have tended to stabilize our society. I'm speaking of institutions such as the churches, large families, the educational system, and so on. This dissatisfaction among the more politicized, expresses itself in railing against bigness, a feeling of loss of identity, a disaffection with the state and authority. For them the easy solution is to embrace a wide variety of philosophies which encourage regionalism, separatism, or nationalism. Call it what you will.

It might be worth noting that these responses are not confined to Canada. To a certain degree, similar forces are at work in other Western democracies such as Great Britain. Just as in Canada, it's the regions around the periphery, using London as the centre which appear most dissatisfied with central government: Scotland and Wales. People living in these peripheral zones tend to perceive, rightly or wrongly, that the centre not only dominates them, but worst of all stifles their legitimate aspirations, interests and demands. In 1971, Northrop Frye observed that "separatism in the Atlantic or Prairie Provinces is often based on a feeling that Ontario regards itself as an Israel or Promised Land, with the outlying provinces in the role of desert wanderers".

So part of the crises and tensions in our society can be explained by this age old battle of centralism vs regionalism. In our history, there have also been crises brought on by various events, e.g. the controversy over the Manitoba School Act, the hanging of Louis Riel and the war time disputes over conscription. And even as early as 1878, the Prime Minister of Canada at the time, Alexander Mackenzie noted that the three great problems facing the country were inflation, unemployment, and national unity. When Lester B. Pearson took over the government from John Diefenbaker, he too was convinced that national unity was the major issue facing the country. A 100 years have passed since Alexander Mackenzie lived and the big three, inflation, unemployment and national unity are still our problems. So one could possibly conclude

that the unity crisis given time will subside to perhaps not re-surface for another 100 years.

Unfortunately, such a conclusion is not valid.

While the general dissatisfaction has been simmering in certain provinces others have begun to take their destiny into their own hands. In Alberta, goaded on by its twentieth century prosperity, there has been talk of separation. These murmurings have been confined by and large to a small vociferous minority. In Quebec, however, a government has been elected, by the democratic process, which has its main platform the fundamental re-structuring of that province's relationship with the rest of Canada - a new relationship which they hope will take the form of a "souverainete-association".

Since the Parti-Quebecois is a freely-elected government within Quebec, one has to conclude that the decisions regarding Quebec's future in Canada will also be made in Quebec and not by the federal government or any other government.

In Quebec the dichotomy between centralism and regionalism takes on an additional important dimension as the level of their dissatisfaction is imbued and vitalized by a strong awareness of their undisputed national identity.

Even before Levesque came to power, Daniel Johnson set down certain demands which he thought were necessary for the preservation of Quebec's integrity and identity. These demands are stronger than any, that other provinces may have made, and were presented to the rest of Canada ten years ago right here in Toronto.

He observed that Quebec should have "the free rein to make its own decision affecting:

- i) the growth of its citizens as human beings
(education, health and social security)
- ii) their economic development
- iii) their cultural fulfillment
- iv) the presence abroad of the Quebec community

He referred to the integrity and identity of Quebecois. By integrity I believe he was referring to pride, being masters of their own house.

By identity he was referring to their distinctive historical development, culture and language along with their collective historical experience. Camille Laurin, prominent cabinet member of the PQ government interprets certain aspects of Quebec history as follows:

"dispossessed of their land they explored, and of the name they gave it, they nonetheless held their original foothold and, after more than 300 years of trials and struggles, they still represent a very large majority. In fact, Quebec is all they possess. Whether right or wrong, it seems they

have decided to keep and develop it in keeping with their history, their culture and their own spirit, no matter what the price or the sacrifices which are the cost of this love, this fidelity and this will. To the English speaking provinces who ask - "What does Quebec want?" French Quebecers now answer: a homeland. Quebec is a nation more so than any other country including Canada, because it has for quite sometime possessed all the necessary requisites of a land, a language, a culture, institutions, history and especially a wish to live and a collective goal".

This is the sort of rhetoric which inspires many of the youth of Quebec - people under 30 or so. The zeal and fervour of the nationalists is backed by among other things a cultural renaissance on a scale of great magnitude and force. Today, French T.V. in Quebec produces 80 hours of programming a week, more than London and Paris combined and greater than New York and Los Angeles. As for writers, in 1971 Quebec supported 400 active writers, in 1976 that number increased to 800.

The actions of the Levesque government since it came to power last November also indicates their determination to pursue what the Parti Quebecois perceives as legitimate goals for Quebec.

Firstly, the government has passed legislation to make French the only official language of Quebec, contrary to the federal policy.

Secondly, it plans to conduct a "door-to-door" propaganda campaign promoting the Quebec of the dreams of the Parti Quebecois.

Thirdly, the conduct of official delegations from Quebec at international conferences such as the Water Conference in Argentina, last year, has demonstrated that the Quebec government plans to use every opportunity to proclaim to the international community its growing distinctness from the rest of Canada.

Fourthly, it has a well thought out and comprehensive political, social, cultural and economic programme for the future of Quebec.

Ladies and gentlemen! As the prophet Jeremiah said, "There is none so blind as those who will not see".

All the signs are there for our interpretation. Never before in Canadian history has a provincial government, in peacetime, aroused and inspired so much emotional commitment in its youth and mobilized so much of its resources to attain its political goals.

This is not a crisis like all the others which will go away with time.

The pessimists believe that it's too late to do anything about the rising tide of nationalism which threatens to

engulf Quebec. They believe that the "fracturing" of Canada is inevitable.

But I firmly believe that there is room for optimism for the following reasons:

- I - There is no extreme polarization as yet. Even the Parti Quebecois spokesmen are talking of an "association" rather than complete separation.
- II - Not every Quebecker embraces the Parti Quebecois ideology. Opinion polls seem to indicate that there are still a considerable number of Quebeckers who will choose to stay with Canada if the structures are altered.
- III - There is still room for manoeuvres, greater accomodation and adjustments.

But time is running out!

If we continue to adopt the attitude of "Let them go, we'll get along nicely without them", if we continue to put forward our vague, circular, rigid and sterile arguments, then we will, by our attitudes make the flames of nationalism burn even brighter and drive more Quebeckers into the Parti Quebecois camp. As views harden and polarize, no one will be unleashed which may be beyond our capacity to control.

As Premier Blakeney has said: "You can only oppose an idea with a better one". We must be prepared to compromise, and we must seek better ideas.

It takes 2 to make a compromise. As for Quebec, the very notion of "souverainete-association" conveys to me a bargaining posture. According to the Oxford dictionary, "association means a body of persons associated for a common purpose. Anyone who has had to bargain in the marketplace or a bazaar knows that no buyer starts with the final price he or she hopes to pay. Compromises have to be made by both parties before a solution is found which will suit the purposes of all parties - Not just Quebec but all the provinces.

This Task Force is committed to preserving our country called Canada, to finding the forms and procedures which will accomodate the aspirations of all Canadians, to playing its part in coordination and cooperation with other elements that are working toward the same goal. All this to be done in order to preserve that which we have built over these many years, and to provide an acceptable base upon which to create the future.

CONCLUSION

Now, what can you as a group and as individuals do to promote Canadian unity?

1. When the Task Force comes to Toronto which will be on the 28th and 29th of November participate in its proceedings either by association with groups making presentations or by observing and understanding its proceedings.

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2. And beyond the Task Force, what can you do?

2. Encourage fellow business associates to remain in Quebec if at all possible. At a recent conference, Madame Therese Lavoie-Roux, a Liberal Member of the Quebec National Assembly observed that the withdrawal of industry from Quebec is laying the cornerstone for separatism. She said that if the threat of withdrawal is held over the people of Quebec they will opt to survive culturally without this economic assistance. Businessmen can help tremendously by exercising long term perspectives and social responsibility.

3. Be aware of what is taking place and develop an attitude that will be receptive to and understanding of, the changes that I feel certain are coming. Take part in the debate; be a participant, not a spectator. Become aware of what others want and become aware of what you want yourself, and how we are to go about achieving our ends.

4. Encourage people whom you meet from other parts of Canada to speak of their aims and aspirations. Attempt to understand them and put your own point of view. Make it obvious that you care - about them, about yourself and thus about Canada. As I said at the beginning of these remarks: "If people agree on objectives, they will sooner or later agree on the means to reach them".

If our attitudes are right, and if we agree upon what we want, then the rest will follow. But we must make obvious our personal support of unity our willingness to sacrifice to achieve it, and our warm sincere desire to keep all Canadians together in one country.