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ADDRESS BY  
ALPHONSE OUIMET  
  
PRESIDENT OF THE  
CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION  
  
TO THE  
  
CANADIAN CLUB  
  
TORONTO  
  
MARCH 28, 1966

O CANADA!

Gentlemen:

There are certain subjects which Canadians just don't talk about these days. This is why I hesitate to say what I have had on my mind for sometime. Not that it might shock you or hurt your feelings. On the contrary, I am sure you will agree with me. But it is something that you don't hear people say any more, even though they may feel it and feel it deeply.

Gentlemen, what I simply want to say is that I love Canada.

Not only French or English Canada, but the whole of Canada. Not only Montreal where I was born, Ottawa where I live, or Toronto where I come often, but Vancouver and St. John's - and the whole half continent in between.

Why? Because the whole of Canada is "ma patrie", my home, my country. I use the French word "patrie" because there is no English equivalent which expresses so strongly in one word what Canada means to me. By the way, what has become of the good old-fashioned word "patriotism", which has the same root as "patrie"? I don't think I have heard it in Canada since the last War Savings Bond Drive.

In any case, I have to choose my words most carefully when I speak about Canada. Canadians of both languages are getting pretty touchy about words these days: perfectly good but emotionally charged words like nation or "nation" in French, or state and "état", words which it is always best to avoid even when correctly used. This is why I always have my scripts reviewed twice, once by an English-speaking assistant and once by a French-speaking one.

I was saying - with some embarrassment, believe me, - that I love Canada, "ma patrie", my country; not just one part of it, but all of it.

Canada! What a country it is already. What a country it will be by the end of the century if we, the Canadians of today - English, French, all of us - succeed in lifting our visions beyond our respective provincial or cultural horizons.

Canada, gentlemen, is the envy of the world. In sheer size, it is the second largest country after the USSR, bigger than the United States, including Alaska and all its possessions, bigger than the other geographical giants of the world, China, Brazil and Australia.

Canada: half a continent in explosive economic growth with extraordinarily abundant and varied natural resources, most of which are yet to be explored. Canada: not yet a hundred years old but already the fifth trading nation in the world, and the third after the United States and Sweden for its standard of living.

There is no question that we are already a very rich country in every material way; but our physical and material blessings are by no means the only factors which make Canada a great country. Canada's cultural heritage is equally unique amongst nations of the world. Where else can you find side by side and in relatively pure form the national traits and traditions of the two greatest cultures and civilizations of modern times?

Gentlemen, I am proud of French Canada's ancestry and of its national qualities. I am proud of English Canada's heritage and of the qualities of its people; proud also of the great enrichment which the strengths and traditions of millions of Canadians of other national origin have brought to our country. We must never forget, however, that Canada can - and should - be greater than the sum of its parts.

In terms of size of population, Canada is, of course, far behind other countries; actually, in 28th place, well after other countries we consider to be relatively unimportant. But in the council of nations, Canada has won a degree of international respect which is far beyond its demographic size. I am thinking of the vital role Canada has played in the UN, in NATO, and at times of international crises such as Suez and Indo-China, as a middle power respected by great and small nations alike. Do I have to say that this international respect was won not only by Canada's willingness to serve but also by its determination to carry out its international responsibilities according to its national conscience, even when necessary, in opposition to more powerful friends and allies. Canada must preserve this independence of international thought and action if it is to maintain the favourable image it enjoys in the world today. In turn, may I say in passing that the maintenance and strengthening of the image Canada has already earned internationally is of paramount importance to the development of the national self-confidence which is needed to keep Canada strong inside as well as outside.

So here we are, citizens of one of the youngest, largest, richest and most rapidly expanding countries of the globe, envied by most and respected by all - and yet so immaturely uncertain about our national future.

As Canadians, we should be sitting on top of the world, radiating national vigor and self-confidence. We should be so united and enthusiastic in our enjoyment of an already great Canada and in our determination to make it an ever better place for our children and for their children that there should be no room whatsoever in our hearts for any form of defeatism.

And yet it is only a few weeks ago that a national magazine, in preparation for a forthcoming feature article, felt compelled to ask a number of prominent Canadians whether they thought Canada would survive as a nation and how much they cared whether it did or not. It is this question and the fact it has to be asked at all which today prompts me to ignore the fascinating possibilities which the Fowler Report on Broadcasting obviously offers to the President of the CBC as a subject for an address to the Canadian Club - and to cry out instead my personal convictions as a Canadian.

"Do I think Canada will survive as a nation - and how much do I care?"

There is no issue of greater personal concern to me than the future of Canada. It is also my primary professional concern.

The survival of Canada as a sovereign country united in its duality; the development of Canadian consciousness; the forging of a Canadian identity; the fostering of mutual understanding among all Canadians; the parallel development of Canada's two great cultures; this is what the CBC is all about.

No other institution, except Parliament, is so enmeshed with the national fabric of Canada as is CBC. As a working organization, the Corporation itself is in many ways a microcosm of Canada, geographically, culturally and ideologically. It has to meet many of the same challenges as face Canada in insuring equal opportunity for the autonomous development of our two major cultures within a single framework of national objectives and policies and in the face of natural but overwhelming pressures from the United States.

This is not the place to assess how well the Corporation is meeting these challenges. You may agree, however, that for a man who has had the good fortune of dividing his years, interest and devotion about equally between our two cultures as well as between Quebec and the rest of Canada, the higher echelon of the CBC provides a rather unique vantage point from which to peer into Canada's future.

From this vantage point, I see a Canada still in the making - and certainly not a Canada that is coming apart. I see honest attempts to come to grips with Canadian problems instead of sweeping them under the rug. I see a young generation of Canadians which is rapidly casting off many of the prejudices and traditional attitudes which have made progress so difficult until today. There is still a great deal of misunderstanding to be overcome but much less ill-will than in the relatively recent past.

The current Canadian scene is largely dominated by the dramatic cultural, economic and political awakening of Quebec from prolonged lethargy; Quebec is in full revolution. A quiet one but a revolution just the same; not against the rest of Canada but against its own reactionary conservatism.

It is as if Quebec had deliberately turned its head away from its past in order to concentrate all its energies on its future. It is completely reforming and modernizing its educational system; it is redefining traditional relationships between the Church and the State; it is cleaning up its politics and streamlining its public service; and it is creating the institutions and the statutes it requires for the proper planning and coordination of its economic and social development.

I am not sure that Quebec's old minority complex is all gone but, for the present at least, it seems to be completely submerged by its new dynamism. Quebec is so busy shaping its future that it has no longer any time - or reason - to worry about its survival.

The explosiveness and vigor of Quebec's quiet revolution and its new self-reliance has caught us all by surprise and has left us uneasy by disturbing a long-established status quo.

But, I ask you, is this a bad thing? Should we not be rejoicing at Quebec's emergence from the past and at French Canada's social, economic and cultural revitalisation? Has it not been the vigor of all Canadians which has brought us to our present state of nationhood despite the most formidable odds? And who would not wish all Canada to share a rebirth of national enthusiasm, vitality and self-confidence?

In accentuating the positive, I am not suggesting that the B & B and the constitutional issues which Quebec's renaissance has awakened will suddenly go away if we do not talk about them. On the contrary, I feel strongly that we would enjoy much better mutual understanding between French and English Canada today if both groups had brought their respective doubts and frustrations into the open long ago, instead of letting them fester under their respective cultural rugs where they have been swept religiously for many generations.

By all means, let us ventilate our internal problems, but let us do so in a constructive, realistic and moderate manner. Let us not mistake Canada's growing pains for the pangs of disintegration. In spite of its silly prejudices and its feudal parochialisms, Canada is not coming apart. But we may be letting it slip away.

Our emergence from our colonial past is so recent that we are still motivated by the same prejudices and loyalties which divided our ancestral colonies. In our sentimental subconscious, we are still British Columbians, Nova Scotians, Upper and Lower Canadians, first - and Canadians last. Even then, we are still for the most part only hyphenated Canadians, French and English, with little appreciation and interest for one another. After a hundred years of Confederation, we are not yet capable of comprehending Canada in its totality. Is it because Canada's total greatness, physically and culturally, is too big for our hearts and minds? This, I will not believe.

We seem to be living today in a great national patriotic vacuum. I am not thinking here so much of the mutual indifference that still separates English and French Canada. After all, cultural and language barriers are never easy things to overcome. But there are no language barriers to explain the little interest which the various regions of English Canada seem to have for one another.

There is no lack of French-Canadianism, nor of English-Canadianism in reaction to it and vice-versa. There are as many kinds of provincialism as there are provinces. But where and when have we last heard a clear expression of truly felt and widely shared positive and enthusiastic Canadianism?

What really concerns me is that we should allow our bicultural difficulties, however serious they may be, to distract us from the much graver long-term threat to Canada's national survival - the threat of being slowly, painlessly and more or less unconsciously sucked into the great American melting pot - in our pursuit of short-term material advantages.

There is much to be said, of course, for the great American melting pot. The Americans, for whom we Canadians have so much admiration and affection, evolved the system and they are a great nation and a great people. For a number of reasons -- chief among them the fact of dual origin -- we evolved differently. We've lived near the rim of the pot for nearly a century without falling in. Do we want to fall in now? Perhaps more than ever before in this period of obvious nationalistic decline, it is time we seriously asked ourselves this question again.

Economically, culturally and in too many other fields, such as those of basic research and labor union leadership, we have already reached a degree of dependency on the United States which is to my mind completely adverse to our long-term national interests.

I am necessarily most concerned personally and professionally with English Canada's over-dependency on the United States in so-called cultural matters; and with similar pressures slowly building up in French Canada.

Without falling in the opposit extreme of cultural isolation, no country, and even less one as loosely knit as Canada, can afford to have its mass communications media dominated by foreign material. And yet, everyone knows that, with our massive consumption of U.S. magazines, books, syndicated columns, comic strips and feature articles, records and motion pictures, radio, television and live entertainment, our Canadian mental diet is overwhelmingly American.

CBC English language television is itself 40 percent American in the evening, while CTV stations average over 60 percent U.S. according to figures published in the Fowler Report. Why? Is it because U.S. television imports are that much better? Unfortunately not. It is largely because they are so much cheaper since they are available in Canada at 5 to 8 percent of their original cost.

In television, as in so many other things in Canada, it is cheaper or more profitable to be American than Canadian. Again, the short-term economic argument wins the day while a major part of Canada's creative potential remains unrealized for lack of opportunity to express itself.

Do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that we should not have a reasonable choice of U.S. television programs on Canadian stations, public or private. I am stating we have far too much. Canadian television, in its broad entertainment and informative role, should give priority to Canadian self-expression, in the widest sense of the word. To use it more than half the time for foreign importation, as we do now, is to misuse the most powerful instrument we have to foster the development of the spirit and culture of our country.

As to the economic over-dependency of Canada on the United States, so much has been said on the subject already that I will touch on it only briefly. Everyone seems to agree that we have been living far beyond our means and that we have been making up the difference by selling half of Canada's capital assets, i.e., its industries and national resources, to United States interests. We have in good part become tenants in our own country and employees of what should be our own industries.

Gentlemen, I am very gravely concerned that, in the management of both our physical capital and of our cultural resources, the long-term objectives of Canada as a nation may have become blurred by short-term considerations. We Canadians have yet too little experience in nationhood and too loose a national fabric to afford to gamble away, even unconsciously, any part of our cultural and material heritage.

In contrast to our provincialistic exuberance, we are already so nationalistically quiet, if not to say quiescent, that I hesitate to suggest that the time may have come for all Canada to have a "quiet revolution" of its own. What we call this revitalization process is not important - a less Quebecish appellation might be more appropriate - as long as the result of the exercise is to strengthen our national resolve, develop our self-reliance and clarify our national objectives.

If only we all could lift our attention away from the foreign temptations and the internal confusions of the moment long enough to grasp again the greatness of Canada's destiny, I would not have to end my address by asking from the bottom of my heart a question to which I cannot give a meaningful answer alone.

Like many of you, I have a grandson. Mine is four years old and what I want to know is very simple:

Do we still want our grandsons, yours and mine, to be Canadians and masters of half the North American Continent, or do we not?

The decision is still ours to take, but time is getting short - and we are all so very busy at other things.

Gentlemen, long live Canada! Vive le Canada!