

S P E E C H

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"CANADA: A BROKEN EXPERIMENT?"

MR. CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN:

Last August, the cover page of Maclean's Magazine depicted Canada as a youngster of about 10 seated between his mother, the Queen of England, and his father, the president of the United States.

Admittedly, this cover was meant to introduce the theme of the lead story which stressed the necessity for us, as Canadians, to defend our birthright. However, viewed from a slightly different angle, that cover underlined in blunt terms what Canada cannot afford to be if she is to survive.

If we analyze Canada as she is, we find that the major elements of influence are derived from the

United Kingdom, from France and to an ever increasing degree from the United States. It is only fitting, indeed it is inevitable, that a young country such as ours should draw on the cultural background of her founders and of her neighbours. However, if we are ever to survive as a nation, these elements must one day synthesize into a set of values in themselves unique. Even in 1973, this synthesis is being, in large part, inhibited by all our attitudes toward the cultural diversity between the two founding races.

Whatever the value and greatness of England, of France, of the United States, Canada can continue to exist only if, once and for all, we destroy the shackles of the "two solitudes" and accept the fact that from sea to sea Canada is an extension of all of us.

In stating this belief, I do not wish to enter any political battle. This, I leave to the decision of the next general election, whatever its date. In that sense, my remarks are nonpolitical. There is another meaning, however, to the word "politics", namely the philosophy that must guide a nation. To that extent, the subject matter of my speech is very much in the political field.

I am aware that I come here clothed with the nonexistent mantle of president of The Canadian Bar Association.

That raises the troubling question of the right of a president to take public positions on issues of a contentious nature, which are political in the sense I have mentioned. This debate has been going on for ages and no doubt will continue to be argued back and forth for years to come. For my part, I am ready to express myself on any question as to which I have a conviction, being careful to emphasize that I do so as an individual and not as president of the Association.

It could well be that this caution on my part has no "raison d'être". We, of the Canadian Bar, are proud of the fact that the Association came into being shortly before World War I as the joint effort of lawyers trained both in the common law derived from England and in the civil law derived from France. From the start, there has been an interchange of ideas and principles between these two great systems of law, interchange through which Canada has been well served. Since the early days, Canadians of both French and English extractions have been called upon to sit around the boardroom table of the Association. I might add that I am the eighth president whose mother tongue is French.

More could be done, I am sure, and we are aware of the need to improve our services so as to make our Association truly and firmly national. The goal is there,

clearly defined in our Act of Incorporation and in our history. It is with that goal in mind that, last March, the council of the Association reaffirmed "its belief that the right to use both English and French should be recognized in all Courts in Canada".

Many other instances could be given as evidence that, in the juridical field, there is an awareness and a desire that augur well of the future.

Barely more than fifty years have gone by since the death of Sir Wilfrid Laurier. You will recall that, at the end of his days, he was wondering out loud if it had not been a mistake for him, a French speaking Canadian, to accept the leadership of his country. Events have shown that his doubts were unfounded and that Canada is mature enough to live with the duality that is her heritage.

Our political leaders have worked like Trojans to convince all parts of Canada to be at the same time distinct and united. It may even be that, surprisingly enough, the leaders have travelled farther than the population along that path which, in spots, has become a bit rocky.

The life and work of Lester B. Pearson have been motivated by that conviction. In his search for ways

and means of establishing this Canadian identity, he has been bold and imaginative. History will not accept automatically all the steps he has taken. It will, however, recognize that his intervention did constitute a new departure.

I suggest that what Lester Pearson felt and grasped is that it belonged to the English speaking Canadians to take the first steps in the direction of a truly Canadian culture. The English Canadian, after all, is the strongest link in the chain that makes Canada and, as such, if he really believes in Canada, he is in duty bound to strengthen the weaknesses that no doubt are the French speaking ones. It is well known that the whole is only as strong as its weakest part and it belongs to the English speaking part of Canada to make sure that the French speaking one becomes strong enough for the whole to survive.

The world that emerged from the Second World War was vastly different from its predecessor. Still, for the English speaking Canadian and for the North American generally, the change was more one of quantity than of quality.

For the French speaking Canadian, the modification was more fundamental. During nearly two centuries, first to survive purely and simply, then more or less by force of

habit, the French speaking Canadian had lived within himself without too much interest in what was going on in the outside world. Please do not misunderstand me. Nobody who knows French Canada will ever subscribe to the folkloric idea that prior to World War II the French Canadian was purely and simply an "habitant" happy to be on his farm. Still, there is no denying the fact that until thirty years ago French Canadians, as a group, were inward looking.

Suddenly, practically overnight, the situation reversed itself. As a group, we felt very much an integral and working part of Canada. We wanted to play our role, a full role in the building of the country in which we believed. To our surprise, if not to our dismay, we discovered that the English speaking Canadians were not quite ready for this development and that it would take some time for new patterns to emerge.

I have already underlined that progress is being made in various fields, but it would be wrong to forget that more progress has to be made, and as fast as possible. Speed is of the essence.

The French speaking Canadian is ready to play his role and to play it with competence in the fields of endeavor which were by and large the traditional preserve of

the English speaking community. For examples:

Groups devoted to the promotion of arts on a national scale would certainly benefit from the counsel of a representative number of French speaking Canadians on their boards.

In the economic field, with the growth of the French speaking market in North America and with the advent of the European community, French Canadians have a substantial contribution to make to the direction and management of national and multinational corporations.

In those two fields, as well as in many others, progress is being made but it does not keep pace with the ability and desire of French Canada to play its full role.

To many French speaking Canadians, particularly amongst the young generation, the slowness of this pace is a cause of irritation, which easily is transformed into opposition, sometimes violence.

Reduced to its simplest dimension, this opposition is based on the assumption that if English Canada does not wish to accept French Canada as a full partner, French Canada might as well go its own way. To most of French

speaking Canadians, this conclusion is wrong because, by way of consequence, it implies the eventual absorption of English Canada into the United States and the virtual disappearance of French Canada as a significant part of North America.

Because I disagree with the conclusion does not mean that I fail to grasp the gut issue involved. My forefathers came to the St. Lawrence more than three centuries ago and, since then, in our family we have been talking French. Perhaps, I can best explain what the French language means to me by asking you to consider what the English language means to you. Over the few hundred years that a French society has existed on these shores, customs particular to it have grown up, dictated in large part by the lives which our predecessors had to lead. Others have their roots, as do yours, in the old country. It would serve little purpose here to list these for, taken individually, they may be small and inconsequential but, taken as a whole, they add up to an important ingredient of what is called "culture".

We, French Canadians, want to retain this language, this culture. We want to see them recognized through the width and breadth of the land. On the other hand, we are ready and happy to partake of the values of the

English language and of the English culture. But, and I repeat the word but, we are in no position to do so if the Canadian world, to which we have opened ourselves thirty years ago, is not also ready to add to its riches those that are no doubt ours. In a sense, we are expecting as much, if not more from the English speaking Canadians than we are expecting from ourselves. The reason therefore is very simple: The English language is certainly not in danger in North America and the non-Canadian contents of the English culture is also very much alive. Obviously, if anyone is in danger of losing his language and his culture, it is the French speaking Canadian. To avoid that fate, we need your help and your support.

Against this background however incomplete and sketchy, is it possible to establish some basic conditions of a truly national consciousness and culture? I venture to offer the following.

The French speaking Canadian has to be accepted. Over the years, I have come across many persons of goodwill who could not understand even the existence of the French speaking group in Canada. So many times have I been asked if it is true that French is spoken in our homes and that our schooling is done in French. Obviously, until

such time as this simple fact of life is known and acted upon, it is impossible to build a Canadian culture that will have one of its mainstays in the French fact.

That French Canada exists should, therefore, be the starting point. But it does not exist as a carbon copy of English Canada. We, French speaking Canadians, are different, with our qualities and with our faults. These qualities and these faults are not those of the English speaking Canadians, which does not mean that one group is superior to the other. As a matter of fact, if the Canadian culture, and therefore the Canadian identity, is to be different from that of the United States, it has to include as a major ingredient the qualities and the faults of the French speaking Canadians. If we were asked to be purely and simply true copies of the English speaking Canadians, it would be simpler for Canada to disappear and to be merged in the United States.

This acceptance of the French speaking Canadian as he is must clearly extend to all provinces of Canada. The tendency to identify French speaking Canada with Quebec is a basic error which, precisely, goes against the creation of a Canadian culture and, therefore, of a Canadian identity. This is not the time, nor the place to recall at great lengths that Canada was discovered by both French and English speaking

explorers and peopled at the outset by French and English speaking hardy citizens. Quite apart from this history which is certainly very important to our subject, one should not forget that there are over 1,000,000 French speaking Canadians outside the province of Quebec. Their existence as French speaking Canadians is a guarantee that Canada will be different as long as they are allowed to develop their possibilities to the hilt.

The goal is easy to define. The methods are something else. Still, some points at this time could be highlighted. They all relate in my view to a basic decision to be taken by the leaders of English Canada, namely to do their best to bring about this Canadian culture and identity that has yet to be defined fully.

It is perhaps odd to speak about taking a conscious decision to help create this identity and culture. Generally, these are forged by events that touch a nation such as a war of independence, a civil war or natural disasters that affect a country as a whole and, having been forged, are polished by the passage of time. Canada never really experienced these events. The extreme good fortune this country had in being born in reason rather than in bloodshed should not deprive us of a united character, but simply dictate that this character, in large part, be the result of

our thoughts and conscious actions.

The first step is no doubt for these leaders to learn the French language. It is always a matter of surprise to me to find that it is easier to talk French in England than it is in English Canada. Historically, it is true that it was easier for Englishmen to learn French because they used to travel to the Continent and spend sometime there. Now that the interchange between the various parts of Canada is of common occurrence, I suggest that the learning of the French language should become easier and easier.

Language is not all; it has its roots in a culture that itself is an expression of a philosophy of life. This culture, this philosophy of life should also be perceived by the leaders of English Canada and accepted. It is only through this method that the understanding of French Canada will be achieved in depth. Obviously, it will be easier for the coming generation to be exposed to both cultures. However, it belongs to us today to accept the thought that any man who is able to experience two cultures would, obviously, derive greater enjoyment from life.

Without being an alarmist, let me repeat that time is short. Already in Quebec the learning of English by French speaking children has been de-emphasized. This is not the result of arrogance. This is not the result of a haughty

This is not a gauntlet thrown in the face of English Canada. It is rather yet another reaction of self-preservation. If only English Canadians could understand this and create the conditions that would render self-preservation useless, the battle would have been won.

I have already alluded to the fact that a bilingual country is one where the price of culture is higher than in a unilingual country. Unless and until we, Canadians, are ready to pay the price in dollars, as well as in sweat and in tears, we will never make a go of it. This cost, of course, should not be borne by the French speaking citizens alone as if they were the only ones to benefit from the situation.

Together we have practically gone a full circle. We started with an image of Canada that was radically wrong because it did not have its roots in the Canadian soil. To correct that situation, we accepted the philosophy that a first-rate culture is a prerequisite of a first-rate politics.

And I add: You cannot have a Canadian culture, much less a first-rate one, without a full acceptance of the French fact across Canada.

This is the challenge and I refuse to accept the conclusion of the pessimist that the challenge cannot be

met. You are members of a Club that proudly calls itself Canadian and you are the leaders of a City that occupies a very eminent place in the landscape of Canada. The task is clearly yours to go out and demonstrate that Canada is not a broken experiment but a dream come true.
