

Talk by R.H. Keefler
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ON BEING A NATION

Just over a year ago, at the beginning of our Centennial Year, I concluded my remarks to The Canadian Club of Montreal by expressing the hope that, in the years to come, we would be able to look back on 1967 and say -- "THAT was the year we discovered our identity as Canadians"; "THAT was the year we laid the foundations for our own national traditions".

"1967" has now passed into history, but it is much too early to assess, and to evaluate, and to put into perspective, its significance and its meaning and its promise for the Second Century of Canada.

Invariably, the true significance of contemporary events remains obscure until future events have added that curious element of vindication which transforms history into heritage and heritage into pride and purpose. Thus, the true worth of our efforts today can be judged only by the generations yet to come; just as we find that only NOW can the efforts of past generations be judged in their true perspective.

So, we continue to ask ourselves - What is it that makes this country, so richly endowed with material wealth, cultural diversity and basically sound political institutions, appear no more united and no closer in its search for its own distinct identity, than it was perhaps 100 years ago? Why is it that our two founding races or cultures continue to cling so tightly to our differences which tend to separate us, when concentration on our

common ideals, philosophies, and material interests would produce a nation of much happier people - a people justifiably proud of what they had created together?

I am going to suggest some answers and some steps we might take, if we think it really important to change the situation.

Undoubtedly, we have an affluent society. And if we regard the affluence of a nation simply as the logical product of its own self-sustaining achievement, then such a nation or such an economy may be considered to possess one of the most fundamental prerequisites for continued growth and prosperity.

Reflecting on the Canadian situation, however, one must reach a somewhat less comforting conclusion. Our affluence is really less an exclusively Canadian achievement than a natural and necessary result of the demand from our wealthy neighbour for the products of our resource-based industries; industries developed largely through the systematic investment of private capital from the United States.

It is not surprising that this close relationship between these two countries has brought with it vast opportunities for trade. While it is not news to state that more goods and services flow across the Canada-United States border than over any other international boundary, it is, nevertheless, a very remarkable fact.

Finding ourselves more and more an integral part of a North American economic complex makes it difficult to look at our own situation with the same pride and sense of common national achievement that typifies the philosophy of our larger and more powerful neighbour.

It is interesting to look at another aspect of our national development - at least I find it interesting - to look at Canada's history of "affluence" in political and constitutional traditions and philosophies. Have we a record here of the kind of internal achievement that gives a nation its own distinct character?

Unlike our neighbour to the South, Canada, by virtue of the British North America Act, with a "booster shot" from the Statute of Westminster, acquired formal nationhood in an almost "fully equipped" fashion, complete with proven constitutional traditions, second-hand political institutions and ready-made standards of national loyalty and allegiance. Canadians - at least Anglo-Saxon Canadians - are proud of their British heritage, and quite understandably so. Our French-speaking compatriots, also quite understandably, have ties with a very different cultural background. But, pride in the achievements and traditions of a mother country - however valid such pride may be - is a poor substitute for shaping one's own national destiny and identity, if that is our goal. More often than not, we think of the wealth of traditions that the two Motherlands created in their own histories, as our Canadian heritage; but is that combined wealth not really just an "inheritance"? Should we perhaps not ask ourselves whether all we have achieved in these first 100 years is merely to have lived quite well on the "interest" from these inheritances? Except for the results of our national efforts put forth during two World Wars, we have not produced much growth in the "principal sum".

Surely a nation does not become mature by living on borrowed or inherited traditions, no matter how highly regarded

these traditions may be or how much their preservation may be cherished as a national virtue. Most countries which have attained nationhood, have suffered in the process. Are we perhaps discovering that, after a hundred years of "twilight sleep", we must still face up to some birth pains in order to produce a healthy family?

The internal conflict accompanying Canada's 100th Birthday has brought into clearer focus the fact that a century of existence as a separate area on the political map of the world does not, in itself, constitute nationhood. What we celebrated in 1967 was the "making of a country"; what we have yet to celebrate is the "birth of a nation", its diverse parts united in a common purpose.

In 1967, as in 1867, the vital question affecting the future of this country of ours remains unanswered. Bruce Hutchison, in his book "Mr. Prime Minister 1867-1964", expressed it in these words:

"Could a nation conceived in vague compromise and dedicated to the defiance of continental logic long endure? Would Canadians permanently pay the price set by nature for their endurance? Or, rejecting the price - especially the price of bi-racial toleration between themselves - would they admit defeat, accept the logic, liquidate the national experiment and fall piecemeal into the embrace of their rich American neighbours?"

and he went on to say:-

".... We have built the machinery of a nation. We have still to build its inward fibre, its sense of unbreakable

community, its instinctive agreement that the nation, though formed of many parts, is one thing or nothing."

During much of 1967, the issue of Quebec's place in Canada persistently dominated the headlines and editorial pages of our newspapers. The subject of national unity emerged as the major theme of the Conservative Party's leadership convention here in Toronto last summer; and the voluntary meeting of the provincial premiers, in November, to discuss the "Confederation of Tomorrow", was surely a milestone in our history. Only a few weeks ago, representatives of the Provincial and Federal Governments made a start in the search for some common approach to the re-drafting of our constitution. Just as suggested earlier that the efforts of one generation can be judged in proper perspective only by the succeeding generations, so too, a certain time must elapse before we can fully assess the results of these meetings.

The B & B Report has been published in part, and anyone who feels that it can be "swept under the rug" is just not facing the realities of our situation.

So, we have our problem beginning to emerge in terms that all can understand, unless we choose not to comprehend. And yet, I have the uncomfortable feeling that what by now should be a true national dialogue, continues to be largely a series of simultaneously conducted monologues. And, I believe, it will remain that way, unless all of Canada is prepared to think, not in terms of how the "Old Colonial Mansion" can be renovated to provide more room for Quebec; but in terms of what the architecture of a

new and modern "home" should look like, to house all the members of the family under one common roof with one common foundations.

Some Canadians have become accustomed to regarding Quebec as the major problem facing Canada today. Others (and I am sure most of you would fall into this more enlightened category) are willing to contemplate the situation more objectively, even going so far perhaps as to view the aspirations of French Canada, not as a threat, but as an opportunity to seriously re-assess the present suitability and lasting quality of the foundations on which our country has rested up to now. Quebec may appear to some of the family as the difficult member and therefore a convenient target for blame, but I, personally, have doubts about the fairness of this interpretation. I have no doubts whatever about the ultimate result, if things develop into an unsympathetic or, even worse, a disinterested attitude.

The Canadian paradox is not just its biculturalism, its bilingualism, its geographic adversities, nor its proximity to the wealthiest nation in the world. The paradox of Canada lies just as much in the ironic circumstance that the framework of its constitution and traditions has been its greatest strength and at the same time its most serious weakness.

STRENGTH - because in the early stages, the existence of a British constitution and a British monarchy helped to avoid the kind of internal struggle for nationhood that usually follows a declaration of independence. A ready-made constitution and a continuity of traditional thinking have helped to preserve Canada as a political entity.

WEAKNESS - because, essentially, the very process of evolving independent nationhood was arrested with confederation. The descendants of the French-speaking child - adopted, somewhat unwillingly on its part, by foreign parents - now looked hopefully, to independent grown-up status as part of a new family. But the English-speaking members of the family were somewhat reluctant to cut themselves off completely from their parents' guiding hand and perhaps some financial assistance from time to time; the parents, on the whole, were quite generous on both counts.

And so Canada today still faces the problem of finding a distinct identity, an identity that must take the place of traditions - traditions to which an increasing part of the population no longer has any genuine affiliation.

Is it not just possible that one of our difficulties might be the reluctant realization on the part of English Canada that it has no experience to deal with the phenomenon of an internally generated surge of emerging nationhood, like the one taking place in Quebec? There was never a need for English Canada to struggle for the achievement of national traditions during these past 100 years; they were handed down from generation to generation as well-preserved original birthday gifts, and the so-called English-speaking members of the family have some difficulty in understanding why the other members can't be satisfied with them. A sort of Professor Higgins approach when he asks - "Why can't women be like men?"

Thus, the problem of dialogue is not just a problem of language, but even more a problem of mental attitude. The assertion of French Canadian nationalism might well be a dynamic manifestation that this country is, in fact, capable of being a nation.

Some other parts of Canada, if their leaders are faithfully expressing the reaction of their constituents, seem to feel that all this is an unnecessary disturbance of a status quo; a status quo that for so long has been a substitute for a heritage not of our own making. It is just possible, even, that some parts of English Canada have a subconscious but nevertheless uncomfortable feeling that they may get left behind; that someone else is setting the pace.

It is more than a possibility, too, that in the years ahead, much of the impetus for a new constitutional framework will come from the Third Group - of neither French nor so-called English background - whose contributions over the past 100 years have left their imprint on almost every facet of the emerging Canadian scene. As one of these so-called New Canadians put it in a public statement recently: "They want to do their full share in building a uniquely and identifiably Canadian nation, and they are becoming increasingly determined to move from the sidelines to the centres of required action."

Traditional philosophies are more and more rapidly becoming inadequate as an effective response in an economic, technological, social and even political environment, where yesterday's

standards of excellence are reduced to barely acceptable standards today and deteriorate into useless, if not dangerous, guide posts for the future.

In the world society, progress has become perhaps the least discretionary of all choices. In every facet of human endeavour, the pace is dictated by those who regard the future as a stated objective, thus forcing everyone else into the "choiceless" position of having to "try harder". Our own domestic progress will not be very satisfactory if we direct our efforts solely towards the streamlining of traditional ways of doing things. More and more, success will hinge on our willingness to reach beyond the comfortable boundary of known and well-proven concepts into an area of uncertainty and risk. More and more, too, must our accomplishments be attained within the framework of the world society. Too much concentration or concern for our domestic problems, could well be self defeating, in the light of world developments.

This question was reviewed at some length by the editor in a Montreal paper on 16 December 1967. I will quote just a few sentences to make the point:

"We, in this country, have become so inward-looking, so preoccupied with our national identity or political survival that we are in danger of committing suicide.....

If the people of the Northeast of Brazil, who represent the world's chronically diseased and hungry men and women, strike out in revolution, our world will disappear.....

The hungry are known as 'combustible people' because, quite simply, they are desperate. Five hundred million such hungry, desperate people have been added to the earth's surface since 1957. At least another six hundred million will come into existence in the decade ahead.....

What are we doing to prevent the shortages that will bring death, within the next three decades, to hundreds of millions on a scale equivalent to nuclear war?"

(end of quote)

An unemotional examination of the situation suggests that shipping food from existing sources may salve our collective conscience and even make good political medicine at home, but it is not solving the problem. Even if the food supply were unlimited, transportation and distribution facilities could not cope with a fraction of the volume needed.

And believe me there is a problem. To see the hundreds of families coming out of their makeshift shelters beside the main highway into the city from the New Delhi airport, at dawn - to see their little fires of twigs light up like candles in the half light looks very romantic. But a drive through the countryside in daylight very quickly provides a Canadian with a completely new standard from which to gauge poverty on a massive scale.

A "Herculean" task in education, the development of new ways to produce and store⁽¹⁾ food where it is needed, and effective methods of population control, present a challenge to the scientific and political leadership of the minority group in the world; the group which now enjoys such a relatively luxurious standard of living - a standard much more precarious than most of us are prepared to admit.

Surely the implications of this world problem present a compelling reason to move more quickly in getting our own house in order?

So, by way of summing up, it seems pretty obvious that we must take some decisions here at home, while we have yet time to influence the course of events.

CONSTITUTIONALLY, are we going to give ourselves the opportunity to move together into uncharted territory of national design? Mere amendments of a constitutional format that no longer meets the modern aspirations of a growing part of our population, may serve to subdue the symptoms but such treatment will not get at the causes of our ailments.

(1) "In Latin America, Africa and Asia, the Gross National WASTE (of food grain) ranges from 30 to 60 percent.

If freshly harvested grain and oil seeds were thoroughly cleaned and dried and stored in air-tight containers, there would be no shortage of food and much of the disease and misery in the world would be eliminated."

A. Ramsay Tainsh, in "Sweden NOW", Dec.'67.

POLITICALLY, are we going to overhaul our machinery, to make it more flexible and more efficient? Urgent changes are required to achieve a greater degree of coordination and a greater measure of common purpose between federal and provincial levels of government. Is it not high time that, in order to assure a concentration of talent at Cabinet level, some Ministers of the State could be appointed? True, this can be and is practised on an occasional and very restricted basis today, but what I am suggesting is a formalized authority and public acceptance for such appointments without requiring the creation of a vacancy in some electoral constituency. This would enable a Prime Minister to strengthen his Cabinet by drawing on resources much wider than often provided by the elected party candidates. It would pave the way to the formation of an Executive Branch of government, emphasizing professional rather than political skills. (I have reached the age where I hope I can make an observation of this kind without my personal motives being suspect!)

With respect to our ECONOMY, could we not exert more effort to encourage our governments to adopt the recommendations of the Economic Council that policies be determined and implemented with careful regard to longer-term possibilities, rather than predominantly in relation to current and short-term (political) considerations? Surely, in view of the imperative need for a drastic improvement in our productivity performance, to offset the effects of anticipated lower tariffs and mounting wage costs, a fresh political atmosphere is essential. Are we going to continue

the reckless course of social welfare at any price? Or, will we take some positive action that will keep us in the race for prosperity through healthy economic growth?

On the political scene at all levels of government, amongst our informal opinion leaders, *including our educationist and academic leaders* and through all information media, are we going to continue to hear mostly from those who would divide us, or are we going to see to it that we hear more from those who would bring us together? As Henry Cabot Lodge once very aptly put it:

"Because a united people can overcome all obstacles, it is a public servant's job to find the common ground and unite. A public servant who seeks to divide the community is like a doctor who is trying to kill his patient."

Ladies and gentlemen, we now have behind us one hundred years of a great Canadian experiment. Let us hope that we have taken with us some of the spirit that created what was at least one of our most remarkable successes - EXPO '67. It gave us another opportunity to demonstrate to ourselves what Canadians, in spite of, or maybe because of our diverse ethnic composition, are capable of achieving when joined together in a common purpose under leadership with inspiration, faith and enthusiasm. Surely the creation of a genuine Canadian identity - the making of a Canadian Nation - is worth a continuous effort of this same kind?

Surely that is better than finding ourselves in the sad position of the hunters in Lewis Carroll's "The Hunting of the Snark" -

"But the valley grew narrow and narrower still,
And the evening got darker and colder,
Till (merely from nervousness, not from good will)
They marched along shoulder to shoulder."