

SERVICE D'INFORMATION

NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS

by

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TO THE CANADIAN CLUB OF TORONTO

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Nine days ago I had the honour of presiding over the inauguration of three new autoroutes, two of which connect Quebec and Ontario, as well as a bridge-tunnel that crosses the St. Lawrence between the Island of Montreal and the south shore and which constitutes one of the most vital links in the Trans-Canada highway.

You will perhaps be surprised to learn that we have named this bridge-tunnel, which is the largest structure of prestressed concrete in the world, after a former member of parliament for York. His name was Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine.

In the general election of 1841, the first election held under the constitutional regime of the Union Act, Lafontaine, who was the leader of the Reformers of Lower Canada, had been defeated in the County of Terrebonne. On the other hand, his friend Robert Baldwin, leader of the Reformers of Upper Canada, had been elected in two counties, Hastings and York. Baldwin asked his friends in York to choose Lafontaine in his place, which they did forthwith.

Some time afterwards, Baldwin was defeated in turn in his own riding, and Lafontaine returned the favour by having him elected by acclamation as member for Rimouski. As you all know, it was out of the alliance between the Reformers of Upper and Lower Canada, sealed by this exchange of courtesies, that responsible government was born.

It is particularly enjoyable for me to recall these facts before the descendants of Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine's electors. As I said at last Saturday's ceremony, the new Quebec autoroutes, one of which brings us closer to Ottawa, the other to Toronto, cannot but strengthen the historic ties that already unite us with our closest neighbors. I then added the following: "This network proves that while Quebec intends to remain faithful to its culture and its own destiny, this is not in order to withdraw into a proud and sterile isolation, but on the contrary, in order to make a new and valuable contribution to the building of a more harmonious Canada and a more brotherly world."

These feelings, these attitudes, these goals of Quebec are nowhere better understood, I think, than right here in Ontario. And I am convinced that today as in the time of Baldwin and Lafontaine, the constitutional evolution of Canada depends largely on what the most progressive elements of our two provinces will be able to agree upon.

For this reason I would like to recall briefly some very simple facts, which may help in better understanding what is going on in Quebec.

The other day I read an article about the Centennial of Confederation, which said that Canada was born one hundred years ago, by an Act of the British Parliament. Strictly speaking, this might have seemed true from the point of view of the author of the article, and I do not doubt his good faith; but you can easily imagine the reaction of a descendant of Louis Hébert or of Abraham Martin when he reads in his newspaper that Canada was born only one hundred years ago.

Nearly every year in Quebec, we see French-Canadian families gathering together from the four corners of the country, and sometimes even of the continent, to celebrate the 300th or the 350th anniversary of the arrival of their first ancestor in the Valley of the St. Lawrence. In 1667, two hundred years before Confederation, according to geographer Raoul Blanchard there were already 656 inhabitants on the heights of Beaupré and 529 on the Island of Orleans. In 1700, between 12,000 and 13,000 French Canadians were settled in the colony, including 8,000 in the Quebec region alone. In 1760, they numbered more than 60,000 throughout the whole colony.

It is obvious that for the descendants of all these pioneers, Confederation is only one of several stages in the life of Canada.

In the first half of the 18th Century, French Canadians already constituted quite a homogeneous community, and under the effect of the climate, the living conditions and the wide open spaces,

"By nature, the Canadians are tall, well built, of a vigorous temperament . . . From generation to generation, necessity has made them industrious. They enjoy hunting, sailing and travelling, and have none of the rather coarse and rustic manners of our French peasants. Normally, when their humour is appealed to and when they are governed justly, they are quite docile; but by nature, they are rather intractable. "

You will allow me not to dwell on the other faults noted by Hocquart. The conclusion that I wish to draw from this is that after three-and-a-half centuries of Canadianism, the French-speaking community of this country must after all have more historic rights than if it were merely another minority. The portrait drawn by Gilles Hocquart goes back, I repeat, to 1737; already, even then, the French Canadians formed an easily distinguishable cultural community. Since then, 240 years have gone by, 240 years during which these same French Canadians have lived together, suffered together, fought together, worked together to civilize this country, to clear it, to organize it, to defend it, and to constantly widen its frontiers. Surely they have gained the right to feel fully at home here.

And there is another fact that is equally well known, although sometimes people seem hesitant in admitting all its logical consequences: that is that there are 5 million French Canadians in Quebec, where they form 80% of the population. They are therefore in the majority, not only by rights but also in number. They hold political power in Quebec.

And this is a fact that every government of Quebec is obliged of necessity to take into account, whatever its political stripe. Surely it is perfectly normal for a government to be the reflection of popular aspirations. Eighty percent of Quebec voters are French Canadians who have nothing against their English-speaking fellow-countrymen, who ask nothing more than to live in harmony and friendship with all other Canadians, who are perfectly conscious of the imperatives of economic inter-dependence, but who nevertheless have enough political realism to want to govern themselves, at least in the fields most closely related to the organization of their social and cultural life.

Which means that in these fields, they will always prefer to be governed by Quebec where they are in the majority, rather than by Ottawa, where they are in the minority. Is this not the ABC of political common sense? In the words of an old saying that you know well: "Good government is no substitute for self-government."

For a reasonable people, there can be no better government than the one that it is able to provide for itself.

I believe that the surest way to bring about the destruction of this country is to confuse the national feeling of French Canadians with separatism. To be against Quebec nationalism in that way is an affront not to the persons one might think, but to a whole people which after three-and-a-half centuries of development and desire for a common way of life,

is conscious of forming a nation in the sociological meaning of the word; a people which wants to live and progress in the direction of its own special culture, at least in its principal homeland, namely Quebec.

But why not in the whole of Canada, people ask. Do you not have your own ministers and members of parliament in Ottawa? Is not the Ottawa government the government of all Canadians?

Yes, certainly, in areas of federal jurisdiction. But here again, let us have a close look at the facts.

Figures just recently published in Ottawa show that out of 1,175 federal senior civil servants with an annual salary of \$17,000 or more, there were only 135 whose mother tongue was French. This means that in spite of the sincere efforts being made to correct this situation, the participation of French Canadians at the levels where decisions are made and carried out is still pretty slim.

Nevertheless there are still some people who accuse French Canadians of wanting to impose their language, and even their will, on the rest of the country!

For my part, I have never met a single French Canadian who wishes to impose bilingualism on all citizens from one end of Canada to the other. On the contrary, it is to preserve

the right of every citizen to serve his country and to be served in his own language that bilingualism is essential at the level of the Federal administration. In other words, it is because French or English unilingualism is a right of every citizen, that bilingualism is a duty for a government that claims to be the government of all Canadians. In any case our linguistic duality is only the outward manifestation of much deeper differences. There are different ways of expressing oneself because there are, to begin with, different ways of seeing, of feeling, of thinking, different ways of being. And the respect of these differences implies much more than official bilingualism; it implies the equality of our two cultures.

The descendants of the discoverers and the *coureurs des bois*, who have settled in all the provinces of Canada and who deeply love this country in its entirety, would not consent with a light heart to be more or less driven back into Quebec. They ask nothing better than to be able to consider the whole of Canada as their homeland. But for this they must be able to feel fully at home there, and not have to renounce their culture in order to be welcomed everywhere as fully equal citizens.

This is what we mean by cultural equality: not a rigid, mathematical equality, which would just be another way of trying to pour everybody into the same mold — we have already suffered too much from this concept, which, for example, contrary to all common sense, would have us apply exactly the same measures and the same standards to provinces that are as different as Quebec and Prince

Edward Island — but an equality of freedom, an equality of opportunities for progress and development, and equality which would be the inspiring principle behind a resolutely binational Canada.

I think that the experience of the last hundred years has shown that to achieve this kind of equality we need more than well-meaning sentiments and good-will on both sides. We need changes of structure, changes in the constitution, and I am very pleased to see that throughout the whole country and especially here in Ontario people are more and more willing to consider such changes, as is shown by the plan for a pre-constitutional conference announced by Mr. Robarts.

Since it was the provinces that took the initiative in the talks that led to Confederation in 1867, it is fitting that it should also be the provinces that begin to prepare the ground for the establishment of a new constitutional order.

They all have an equal interest in doing so because — and this is another fact that I would like to emphasize in concluding — it is not just Quebec, nor just the community of French culture that feel restricted in their normal development by the present state of affairs. Because some people obstinately refuse to recognize that Quebec is in a special situation, as the heart-land of French Canada, they would prefer that even in the area of social security, and even in many cases in matters of education and culture,

the same laws should apply in the same way to each and every province. As a result, Quebec and the rest of the country are in one another's way, always frustrated in their efforts to achieve their ambitions that are perfectly legitimate on either side.

In fact we are playing a strange game, a game of let's pretend. When the Federal government offers an option which is quite obviously designed for Quebec, it pretends to offer it to all the provinces; and once Quebec has exercised its option, to reestablish uniformity they ask the other provinces to pretend to want some too. In this game, everybody is a loser. So that all of us will finally be able to evolve in complete freedom in the direction of our own inner aspirations, we will have to break through the wall of appearances and recognize once and for all the special situation of Quebec.

Just how this special case can be fitted into a single framework that will safeguard the integrity of Canada this is what we must seek together. I agree that it will not be easy, but if we work in the same spirit of understanding and friendship that animated Lafontaine and Baldwin, I am sure that we shall succeed.

To achieve their full development as a community of French language and culture, French Canadians will always want to rely on a strong Quebec, enjoying a broad autonomy; but they will be happy to be able to count as well on a strong central government provided that it is solidly founded on the principle of cultural duality which alone can assure Canada its harmony, its originality, and its true greatness.