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Canadian Club

Moved by a deep historical sense, many Canadians are now making efforts to come to grips honestly, frankly, and realistically with the great issues that are to determine the character of Canada tomorrow. I will not expect, therefore, that what I say today will find agreement everywhere or that everything I say shall have the same general reception. But I hope that my endeavour to state the position of Canadian federalism at this time, and to mark out the tendencies suggestive of its future, will be taken for what such statements really are, namely, a serious, determined effort by myself to share fully the responsibility in the present Canadian dialogue, where we are all participants whether we like it or not.

Au moment de la naissance de la Confédération, il y a cent ans, nos prédécesseurs eurent le souci d'établir des liens véritables entre les Canadiens d'expression française et les Canadiens d'expression anglaise. Aujourd'hui, à un siècle de distance, nous nous rendons bien compte – et c'est ce qui importe – que la Confédération n'aurait pas été possible sans le désir profond et sincère de créer un cadre juridique à l'intérieur duquel les deux groupes linguistiques du pays pourraient vivre en harmonie et dans le respect mutuel l'un de l'autre: un cadre permettant tout autant une action commune en certains domaines qu'un programme autonome dans d'autres.

To me, the primary historical lesson of Confederation, at its founding, was the serious and frank effort to embrace two peoples within a common system of federal government, which implied both a common program and a large measure of provincial autonomy for those vital concerns for which that autonomy was indispensable.

What happened to this political understanding implicit in 1867? In a way, there was from the beginning both success and difficulty. Whatever the strength and weaknesses of the British North America Act, it was clear that it spoke the difficult and necessary language of compromise: a strong federal government was to be balanced by effective provincial authority.

But regional or provincial government in 1867 was not yet by itself a powerful instrument. Weak bureaucraties, limited financial resources, modest educational and welfare programs, little or no economic intervention in the modern sense all of these were characteristic of Quebec and other provinces.

However no provincial administration has ever accepted to be considered as a subordinate instrument of the central government, and Canadian public opinion has always been strongly opposed to any federal action which could have been permanently destructive of genuine provincial autonomy. This basic resistance to federal claims to supremacy, combined with the judicial interpretations of our constitution, has firmly established the equality of status of the federal and provincial governments and the integrity of their respective powers.

Then came two great experiences which again altered the political and constitutional balance of our Canadian existence: the great depression of the 1930's followed and terminated by the war and post-war « forties and fifties ». Both periods invited vast programs

of federal action. The provinces were unable to cope with unemployment and the federal government had to take on many burdens in fields which were of provincial jurisdiction. Because it commanded the total resources of the nation, the last war required a high-centralized system of government and a very superior bureaucracy that carried its concepts far into the postwar period in the management of the Canadian economy. Thus, a few years after the war, we find that the federal apparatus, the federal interest in local activities had approached proportions that could have indefinitely increased the scope of federal administrative action.

It was then that new economic and political realities emerged to challenge this long-term trend in the growth of federal power. Those realities had to do with certain unforeseen developments in the Canadian economy, in the organization of the provinces' political life, in the changing welfare demands of the people and above all, they had to do with fundamental social pressures and changes in Quebec itself.

On the general economic side, what was happening in Canada was the fascinating – if disturbing experience whereby affluence with unemployment, rapid development with regional poverty seemed to be becoming a fixed model for our land. Regrettably a very large part of that poverty and of that unemployment happened to be in the province of Quebec and in the Atlantic provinces. National economic policy, monetary and fiscal policy, were themselves unable apparently to make a major « final » assault on unemployment and regional underdevelopment.

At the same time certain significant provincial needs began to appear everywhere. The population changes in Canada, the new technology and automation, all together demanded of provincial and municipal governments a radically new approach to education and training. And while it was true that some financial support was coming from federal sources, the main burdens had to be borne by the provinces. Moreover, to this educational and population challenge were added the problems of rural development and those of urban expansion.

Au Québec, ces problèmes, ces tendances nouvelles, furent particulièrement marquées; elles prirent un caractère un peu spécial, car elles provoquèrent des changements sociaux et culturels profonds qui modifièrent la structure de toute la société québécoise. Une nouvelle génération de Canadiens français pleins de confiance dans leurs nouvelles connaissances techniques, aussi bien dans le domaine des sciences que dans celui des affaires, cherchèrent l'occasion de mettre leur compétence à l'œuvre et de réformer la communauté québécoise dans son ensemble.

Ainsi – et c'est là-dessus surtout que je veux insister – Québec maintenait l'opinion qu'il fallait laisser aux provinces la solution des problèmes qu'elles seules pouvaient résoudre efficacement: éducation, bien-être, réaménagement rural, développement urbain, etc. Ces problèmes étaient la conséquence normale de notre réévaluation de la place que le Québec moderne devait occuper dans la Confédération canadienne et de notre conception de l'évolution qu'il était souhaitable d'imprimer à notre pays.

On peut affirmer que nous avons vécu et que nous continuons de vivre au Québec une double révolution tranquille. D'un côté, nous reconnaissons à notre gouvernement un rôle de

premier plan dans les domaines qui relèvent constitutionnellement de sa juridiction et aussi dans ceux qui, à notre avis, présentent des difficultés que nous sommes mieux placés pour résoudre. Il se produit aussi une deuxième révolution tranquille. Il s'agit de la réforme sociale profonde de notre société canadienne-française où sont désormais respectées de nouvelles normes dans la fonction publique, où l'on recherche une nouvelle qualité dans nos entreprises intellectuelles et artistiques et où l'on donne à nos initiatives d'ordre économique un dynamisme inconnu jusqu'à maintenant.

Comme vous pouvez le constater, j'ai essayé de situer les tendances actuelles du Québec dans le contexte plus large de l'histoire canadienne et aussi dans celui d'un présent qui exige de tous les Canadiens des réponses précises aux problèmes de l'heure. Cependant, je n'ai pas l'intention d'éluder les difficultés d'ordre politique qui viennent à l'esprit de tous ceux qui s'interrogent sur l'avenir de notre pays. Je m'empresse de dire que le gouvernement fédéral semble, depuis quelque temps, démontrer une meilleure compréhension de notre point de vue. Au cours des dix derniers mois, le Québec et les autres provinces ont réussi, par la négociation, à obtenir des sources de revenus plus étendues. Le gouvernement fédéral est également prêt à accepter le principe de l'option en vertu duquel il nous sera possible de nous retirer d'un bon nombre de programmes conjoints moyennant compensation fiscale.

En somme, tant par une répartition nouvelle des champs de taxation que par le retrait du Québec des programmes conjoints touchant les domaines qui relèvent de sa juridiction, nous sommes en train de nous acheminer vers une situation de fait qui, sans être parfaite, représentera tout de même un progrès considérable par rapport à la situation antérieure. Il nous sera donc possible, à nous du Québec et sans détriment pour qui que ce soit, de résoudre nous-mêmes et à notre façon les problèmes de croissance auxquels nous avons à faire face.

Notre action politique ne vise pas à nous isoler des autres provinces du pays. Naturellement, notre situation particulière de province d'expression française influe sur le caractère et l'allure des positions que nous prenons; toutefois, nos initiatives dans le domaine des relations fédérales-provinciales ont été – je crois que nous avons le droit d'en être fiers – avantageuses non seulement pour nous du Québec, mais aussi pour les citoyens de toutes les autres provinces du pays.

But now let me turn to the evidence that Quebec, though it may opt of « joint programs », is not opting out of Canada whatever may be believed by the uninformed and the timorous. If there is debate over fiscal and monetary policy, if there are reservations about the size and cost of military expenditures by the federal government, such issues are not raised to intrude upon present federal jurisdiction, but they aim at opening the door to a new technique of discussion which so far our federalism has not provided for except through the mechanism of political representation at the federal level itself.

This is not the proper time to discuss the required changes in any future Canadian constitution, changes that would reflect the present dialogue and the political experience that is now in the making.

Many studies are now under way, in dtoyal Commissions, in provincial and federal legislative or special committees, and in other efforts that are beginning to reshape our understanding of the minimum requirements of a new Canadien constitution. You will appreciate therefore why I must speak with the caution and indeed with the humility that must surround so great an enterprise before it is in fact beyond the studying stage.

But the problem has already been sufficiently aired for anyone to see clearly that there are at least two minimum claims which a very great majority of French-Canadians make upon our Confederation. The first of these in a Status for the Frenchspeaking Canadian equal in all respects to that of the Englishspeaking Canadians This means in the immediate future: French as a working language in the federal administration and French as a teaching language for French minorities outside Quebeco The second claim is that of a genuine decentralization of powers, resources and decision making in our federal systemo Quebec, I have often said, believes in harmony through consultation and discussion among equals, not through a uniformity imposed by an all powerful central governmento At the moment, we believe our political framework to be flexible enough, especially if it were to be adapted to present circumstances, to allow for a centering in the Quebec government of all the means necessary to the development of a French-Canadian nation mainly concentrated within our borders. This political framework, grounded as it is on historical, geographical and economic realities, is resilient enough to secure the permanency of a country that stretches from coast to toast.

I believe that we will not solve our problems by seeking solutions that may divide peoples at a time when everywhere efforts are being made by others to find reasons to unite reasons that are economic, political and often simply human. We must see the Canadian changes of the future in the context of a world situation where a vast reshaping of the consciousness of men is now under way. In days to coure, communications and needs are bound to bring men of all languages, religions and races Gloser together than ever before. Perhaps even the exploration of space augurs well for our common hymanity because from some platform on the way to the moon, men will have an « extraterrestriai view » of themselves and thereby gain a new perspective and a new humility.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are all of us groping for sensible and creative answers. I regard myself as someone obliged to seek perhaps radical solutions but always by moderate means. Those who are perturbed by the idea that Confederation may some day have to yield to the pressures of revendications from Quebec should have the patience, the courage and the strength to try for the higher prize, the prize of unity amid diversity, of a common national strength, side by side with the opportunity for us, Quebecers, to develop our aspirations and our traditions so that they may be fulfilled in their many ways.

If the past generation of an immensely fluid Canadien political experience has taught us anything it is that the creative political imagination can provide more than one answer to what may seem insoluble problems. I believe that the creative Canadian imagination is now at work and that it will give us answers, –some now in the making — that will some day make the present troubled debate appear to have been a valuable, honourable training ground for the Canadian future.

WE ARE SEING TRIED, BUT WE SHALL NOT BE FOUND WANTING.