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Canadian Club of Montreal

Il y a quelques jours à peine nous terminions une année sur laquelle les historiens futurs de la province de Québec auront beaucoup à dire. Je suis convaincu, en effet, que nous venons ensemble de vivre le début d'un mouvement dont nous connaissons déjà l'ampleur mais dont la portée véritable se manifestera surtout au cours des années qui viennent.

Le peuple du Québec, avec toute l'énergie dont il est capable, s'est engagé dans le renouveau qu'il souhaitait depuis des années.

À cause de cet élan qui le transporte, il a eu tôt fait de réclamer la collaboration du gouvernement de la province à son entreprise. Il savait d'ailleurs que ce gouvernement, que j'ai l'honneur de diriger, s'était à plusieurs reprises montré favorable aux projets qu'il nourrissait et que, de fait, il les avait inclus dans son propre programme d'action. C'est ainsi que des groupements d'hommes d'affaires, des formations syndicales, des sociétés culturelles et de nombreux organismes de citoyens sont venus demander l'appui du gouvernement qu'ils considéraient comme seul capable, à cause des moyens dont il disposait, de les aider à traduire dans les faits les aspirations de la population tout entière. En somme, désireuse de se procurer les instruments qui lui manquaient, s'adressait par la voix des groupes qui la constituent à la plus puissante structure administrative de la province, son gouvernement.

Nous ne pouvions raisonnablement refuser de coopérer avec des citoyens chez qui nous sommes conscients d'avoir, en partie, allumé cette volonté de renouveau qui étonne aujourd'hui plusieurs de nos concitoyens. Nous étions même heureux d'accorder l'appui qu'on nous demandait car, en le faisant, nous nous rendions, comme il se doit en toute démocratie, au désir d'une population dont il ne fallait pas décevoir l'attente.

This is the reason why we have put so much effort during the last few months into introducing innovations the number and variety of which are without precedent in this province. At the administrative level, for example, several Departments have been reorganized to enable them to function more efficiently, the better to serve our population. We have also made every effort to give back to public office its real meaning, by restoring its true value and by trying to interest competent persons and gifted young people in taking up careers in administration.

From the economic view point, we have prepared several projects. The General Investment Trust is one of them and will come into being at the next session of the Legislature. In the sphere of social legislation, we have set up the huge hospital insurance programme which is well known to all of you, and which has already helped thousands and thousands of Canadians to receive treatment that their state of health required. A great many of these people have also profited from the new school allowances and from the increase which we granted to the recipients of certain social security measures.

In the case of culture and education, we have undertaken the carrying out of a long term plan some of the effects of which are already being felt. We now have a Department of Cultural

Affaire -the only one of its kind in America thanks to which Arts and Letters will receive a new stimulus in our province. In the field of education itself, a great deal of legislation was passed. This was very necessary because the lag which we had to make up — and which we still have to make up — permitted of no delay in that part of our programme which could be realized at once. As for the rest of our programme, we are not yet in possession of all the elements we absolutely need in order to fulfil it. The Royal Commission on Education will give us valuable information on these points.

In short, if I avert to sum up what we have done during the last few months, I would say that we have, on the one hand begun to answer the needs which had to be filled at the earliest possible moment; this applies particularly to our social policy, through which we hope to approach this ideal of authentic social justice which should inspire any government that is conscious of its responsibilities.

You will admit as I do, however, that no really efficient policy can get along on purely curative measures. Otherwise, in spite of the temporary improvements that may result from these measures, there is always the risk that sooner or later the unhappy situations which we wanted to do away with will arise again. Our action must therefore have another dimension; I would say that it must be a preventive one in the sense that it will strike at the roots of the problems we are facing today, and which our so-called « curative » measures can do no more than lessen.

This is why, on the other hand, we decided to provide the people of Quebec with the means which, we hope, will allow them to find definite solutions not only to their present difficulties, but also and especially to those difficulties that would otherwise continue to make themselves felt and which, as the experience of all countries has shown, would certainly become more serious. What we want then, if I may say so, is to cure the sickness before it spreads and forces us into taking much more costly measures later on, when today's unsolved problems will inevitably have become much more important. There is no need for me to go into a great deal of details to prove what I am saying. In fact, a good part of the expenses incurred today by the Provincial Government — and consequently by the citizens of Quebec — is really the result of what past generations were unable to do, for reasons that were probably valid at that time, to solve problems the consequences of which we are now suffering. In a way, the present generation is paying the heavy price of past inaction.

Today we have a wide knowledge of things, and we also have abilities which were unknown to those who came before — and I am not speaking here of the provincial administration that we succeeded; as a matter of fact that particular government could have used those means because they were available just as they are now. What I mean to say is that we are living in an era in which it is almost forbidden not to act. Science has made great progress, techniques have been perfected, our conception of the role of the State has changed, our relative wealth is more abundant, the economic theory is more precise, our knowledge of the society that surrounds us is greater. We are no longer totally helpless in the face of the blind forces of the economic world;

if we can oppose resistance and to a certain extent correct the conditions in which we live. Better still, we can prepare for the future by making necessary decisions now, for example by

allowing the people to develop along intellectual as well as material lines. In this way they will be better able to accomplish the tasks which await them, the fulfilment of which will guarantee their future well being.

For all these reasons, therefore, we must take action in two directions at once: solve our present problems, and prepare for Quebec's future. The task to be undertaken - and which has in large part already been undertaken - is far from being an easy one, and you can easily understand why. We must coordinate a considerable number of different fields of activity; we must take into account not only the consequences of the problems we are attacking, but also those of the solutions that we put forth and of which several have begun to be carried out. We must never forget that any action taken with the aim of modifying social conditions or generally widespread behaviour brings in a new *État de affaire* to which we must sometimes give our attention; in fact, we can never be sure beforehand that the steps we have taken will end with the ideal result which is our final aim. In that case, readjustments are called for, followed by new solutions. This is a perfectly normal phenomenon, and public administrators must expect to meet it.

There exists another phenomenon which is just as serious. Our population, as I have said all along, has needs which it intends to satisfy. They want to have better government services, to encourage the proper development of their natural resources, to promote the industrial development of the province, to stimulate agricultural progress; they also want to give themselves a form of social security that will take family responsibilities more into account, and they want more adequate health services. And finally, they wish, and this wish - I should say this demand - is of prime importance to us - they want to raise the level of education and culture in the province.

These are all vital needs. It is not a question of providing the population of Quebec with sumptuous institutions or services, if I can so express it. On the contrary, the needs that I have just mentioned are absolutely essential, because they are linked with the intellectual and material development, which is the basis of all modern societies, and with which we must of necessity endow Quebec.

These essential needs must be satisfied if we want to give Quebec the place it deserves in our country. However - and this is the other phenomenon I referred to a minute ago - these needs will call for considerable disbursements. In order to meet these disbursements Quebec's financial resources will have to be increased, it will have to have greater revenues.

Through direct or indirect taxation the citizens of Quebec are already contributing a great deal to the financial resources which their government spends, and which it uses for the common good. But this source of revenue is not inexhaustible; it would even be pretty unjust to make it carry the whole load of present or future innovations at a time when the sharing of tax revenues between various levels of government in the country needs to be reexamined in the light of the economic and social conditions which prevail in Canada at this time. Today we are living to a great extent within a framework to which was designed to fulfil a function that has long since been made obsolete by the course of events. The present distribution of sources of revenue between governments was thought out, applied, and instituted for the most part during the last war. It was continued during the post-war period and is still

practically the same. However, it so happens that the motives of the federal government at that time have now but a great deal of their relevance.

During the war, it was normal that the whole country's human and financial resources should, whether we liked it or not, be pointed toward one goal — victory. The central government therefore was justified in claiming all the sources of revenue that it needed from the provinces, of course, fully understood the seriousness of the situation and cooperated with the central government.

After the war and during the years which followed it, the readjustment of the Canadian economy to new conditions, the latent dangers of a major economic slow-down, the impetus which had to be given to certain investments that were intended to profit the whole country, all these reasons necessitated that the old arrangements should continue. At that time, Canada had certain needs which, we admit, took priority over those of the provinces; it was necessary that these needs be filled because the future of the country was at stake. This period of relative emergency lasted for about fifteen years.

Such is not the case today. The provinces are the ones who now have priority needs. A state of war no longer exists; the immediate post war readjustment of our economy is now an accomplished fact. Of course, the federal government continues to have a great responsibility as far as economic policy is concerned, because in accordance with the constitution it keeps control of the money and can influence the trends and volume of international trade. The balanced economic development of our country requires that the central government act in those spheres which come under its jurisdiction; in so doing, it plays a role which no one would seriously think of contesting. However, we of the province of Quebec — because of the great needs of our population, because of the enormous investments which our population must make in all fields of its social and economic life in order to fill all these needs — we feel that it is no longer right for the revenues of the federal government to keep on being as large as they are now. On the contrary, it is the sources of revenue of the provinces which should be increased. In Quebec we do not like to see the federal government spending its money for useful things when we could be using it to carry out, essential, things such as I mentioned a few moments ago.

Dans une grande mesure, ne l'oublions pas, nous vivons aujourd'hui à l'intérieur d'un cadre conçu en fonction d'une situation depuis longtemps dépassée par les événements. La répartition actuelle des sources de revenus entre les gouvernements, même si elle s'est quelque peu modifiée depuis, a été pensée, mise en application et institutionnalisée en grande partie à l'occasion de la dernière guerre. Elle a été conservée dans l'après-guerre et persiste maintenant à peu de choses près. Cependant, il arrive que les motifs sur lesquels s'était fondé le comportement du gouvernement fédéral dans le temps, ont perdu aujourd'hui beaucoup de leur pertinence. Ce sont maintenant les provinces qui ont des besoins prioritaires. L'état de guerre n'existe plus; la réadaptation de notre économie à l'après-guerre immédiat est maintenant chose accomplie. Le gouvernement fédéral continue évidemment d'avoir une grande responsabilité en matière de politique économique car il détient toujours, selon la constitution, le contrôle de la monnaie et peut influencer le volume et la direction des échanges internationaux.

Mais il reste que notre population a des besoins qu'elle tient à satisfaire. Elle veut jouir de services gouvernementaux meilleurs, favoriser l'aménagement rationnel de ses richesses naturelles, encourager le développement industriel de son territoire, stimuler le progrès de son agriculture; elle veut aussi se donner un régime de sécurité sociale qui tienne mieux compte des charges de famille et elle désire des services de santé plus conformes à ses besoins.

Elle souhaite enfin – et ce souhait, cette exigence devrais-je dire est pour nous d'une importance capitale – elle souhaite hausser le niveau de l'éducation et de la culture dans la province.

Il s'agit là de besoins vitaux. Il n'est pas question en effet de fournir à la population du Québec des institutions ou des services de type somptuaire, si je peux m'exprimer ainsi; au contraire. À cause de ces besoins immenses de notre population, à cause des investissements énormes qu'elle devra effectuer dans tous les secteurs de sa vie économique et sociale pour y répondre, nous considérons que les sources de revenus du gouvernement fédéral n'ont plus de raison d'être aussi étendues. Au contraire, ce sont celles des provinces qui doivent être élargies. Nous acceptons mal, au Québec, que le gouvernement fédéral consacre les sommes dont il dispose à des fins utiles, alors que nous pourrions les employer à la réalisation d'objectifs essentiels, les besoins dont je viens de parler sont absolument essentiels parce qu'ils se rattachent à l'équipement intellectuel et matériel qui se trouve à la base des sociétés modernes et dont il faut, de toute nécessité, doter le Québec.

All this will explain why we, at this juncture, are insisting so strongly upon the necessity for our province to obtain the sources of revenue for which it has such an urgent need. We have every reason to believe that our needs have an obvious priority over

- those of the central government; we have no reason, or almost none, to accept the continuation of a state of affair which should be discussed as soon as possible — because a state of emergency does exist.

The argument that I have just put forward is always behind our attitude on questions of federal-provincial relations. You may have noticed it in our proposals on fiscal affairs and in our desire that a complete reexamination of the present distribution of revenue sources be made both by the provinces and the central government.

This could be followed — by a major overhaul of the Canadian Constitution — which would be a good thing. It is certain, no matter what happens on this subject, that the future of our country itself will depend to a great extent over the coming years upon the attention we give to the primary needs of the provinces which make up this Canada of ours.

In the other provinces of our country, there are projects the precise details of which I do not know. In Quebec, at any rate, we are concentrating all our efforts towards the building of a better world in which to live. In order to do so, it is absolutely necessary for us to get the materials that we lack. This is the deepest wish of the whole of Quebec's population; it is also the deepest wish of its government.