

"I AM A CANADIAN"

The X-Press was visited recently by renowned Canadian journalist and broadcaster Joel W. Aldred. Mr. Aldred is currently touring the country in an effort to heighten public consciousness with respect to national unity. The former R.C.A.F. pilot, war hero, and Prime Ministerial confidant has a broad and distinguished career which encompasses different facets of public service, recently acting as chairman of the Communication Information Committee of the National Council on Aging.

The centerpiece of the tour is a poem composed by Aldred in 1967, on the occasion of Canada's centennial. Entitled "I Am A Canadian," the poem (*printed at right*) addresses the multicultural history of Canada and the people who have "provided the soul" to fill the expanse of its physical landscape. Penned with the purpose of making a unique contribution to the nation's centennial celebrations, Aldred says he wanted avoid a "syrupy" tribute or one laden with "platitudes." The inspiration for the poem came partly from the 1960 Bill of Rights, and partly from an obscure quotation by American president James Garfield, who observed that "Territory is but the body of a nation...The people who inhabit its hills and valleys are the soul." The point of ethnic diversity is also achieved in Aldred's poem, as he notes that it begins before the literal history of Canada as a nation. Through mention of the "primitive hunter" and "Renaissance navigators" Aldred manages to "capsulize the basic background of humanity in Canada." Aldred also notes that, owing to its unifying theme -- vis a vis drawing together the threads of Canada's cultural mosaic -- the poem is "more significant now than ever before."

Addressing the issue of constitutional renewal, Aldred cautions that the present constitutional agreement is "not a done deal," and that a Yes vote in October would merely be a license to proceed with further negotiations. "It is going to require a political Einstein to work out the differences [between the parties involved]...we have yet to define the final terms of the new agreement" declares Aldred, commenting on the deal's resolution of particularly contentious issues, such as the question of aboriginal self-government. When asked how the current feeling of nationalist sentiment in Quebec compares with previous years, Aldred replied that "Separation is not new...In any society there are dissidents...[a primary] question regarding a separate Quebec is where are the financial tradeoffs going to be?" He also adds that the nationalist feeling in Quebec has been "driven from different perspectives; from different leaders."

These variances in political resolve are not the focus of Aldred's poem, however. He maintains that the re-issuing of the poem is not a politically oriented venture. His motivation is not to influence the outcome of the constitutional referendum, but rather to "buttress a feeling of national unity" which lies latent in a national mindset where "patriotism has slender value."

I am the primitive hunter who first crossed the Bering Isthmus from Asia. I came seeking game, and never knew what I had really found. I am the lonely explorer who ventured the edges of a new world. I am the people of coast and plain whose history was forgotten before the invention of History.

I am the Norsemen who sailed beyond Iceland at the time of the Crusades. The men who returned home, not with Saracen Plunder, but with stories of a land past the sea.

I am the Renaissance navigators who came in search of gold and empire, and discovered a deeper, more difficult wealth. I am the priests and peasants uprooted from the old world and replanted in the new as a pledge.

I am the strip farmers, the trappers, the traders who pushed back the curtain on this green and untried continent. I am the men who roamed and mapped and settled, the men who left their sons to the future, and the men who left only their graves.

I am the steady men who sowed and reaped, who built lasting foundations. I am the impatient men who fought with guns and pens and politics for self-determination. I am the indomitable men who would not be stopped as they hammered together a nation.

I have walked this land, ridden, driven, flown and paddled across her millions and more millions of miles. I have blasted her rocks, channeled her waterways, survived her snows. I have run my hands over her face, searching out the strengths and beauties and moods of my country. She is rich, wild, potent.

I came from all the world, and come yet. I came for freedom, and brought freedom with me. I came in hope, and brought fulfilment. I came to exploit, and stayed to develop. I gave myself in barter for what I sought. In measure as I have made Canada what she is, she has formed me to her own needs. Her breadth and openness have infused me, have given me a firmer step and a farther look in the eye.

I am not the Average Canadian. There are no average Canadians, and this is my country's glory. It is the surest measure of her freedom to be a nation of individuals, people who are Canadian by nature rather than by decree.

I am a Canadian, I am deeply myself. For this privilege I give thanks to my country. May she never falter, and may she never swagger. May she realize her potential without losing her character. May she have peace, and may she give it. May it always be a proud thing to say: I AM A CANADIAN.