

Appendix

PREMIER'S OFFICE
Saskatchewan

Regina, September 22, 1949

Right Hon. L. S. St. Laurent,
Prime Minister of Canada,
Ottawa, Ontario.

My dear Prime Minister:

Thank you for your letter of August 18, which contains your reply to my request for the reconvening of the dominion-provincial conference.

The Saskatchewan government learned with a great deal of regret that you felt that no good purpose could be served by holding a full-dress dominion-provincial conference. I have reason to believe that our regret is shared by many of the other provinces, and indeed by large numbers of people across Canada. May I respectfully suggest that the main reason given in your letter for not holding such a conference is hardly germane to the question under discussion. After all, the dominion-provincial conference on reconstruction was convened by your government and the agenda was drafted by the members of your cabinet. I would take it for granted that if you chose to reconvene the conference you would again accept responsibility for preparing the agenda. It is true that in my letter I suggested that such matters as health insurance, old age pensions and responsibility for able-bodied unemployed should be subjects for discussion, but only because these were placed on the agenda by your government in the first place. At no time did I suggest that we should "consider restricting in any way the legislative authority of the Parliament of Canada for 'raising of money by any mode or system of taxation'". I can quite appreciate the fact that the dominion government would not look with favour upon restricting its fields of taxation, but I made no such suggestion and I doubt that anyone would expect your government to place such an item on the agenda in preparation for such a conference.

Your suggestion that more progress can be made by frank discussions with individual provinces about separate concrete problems is open to question. It is true that there are specific problems regarding difficulties which are peculiar to certain geographical areas which can be handled better by individual discussions. However, this is not true

when we come to deal with matters which affect the whole Canadian economy more or less uniformly. I am sure that there is hardly a province in Canada which is not already wrestling with the problem of responsibility for the able-bodied unemployed. This is a responsibility which the Rowell-Sirois commission recommended should be assumed by the federal government, and in August 1945, this was one of the proposals advanced by your government on their own initiative. Already our urban municipalities are confronted with the problem of caring for the employable unemployed, and I am sure that their experience can be duplicated in almost every urban centre of Canada. The Saskatchewan government contends that this is a state of affairs which ought not to be dealt with on a piecemeal basis, but ought to be the subject of general discussion of all the governments concerned and some uniform policy adopted across the Dominion of Canada.

I am pleased to note that you hold out the hope that it may be found desirable to convene a conference with a limited agenda. As I have already stated, the matter of the agenda lies largely with your government and you will have to accept the responsibility as to how limited the agenda will be. If it is so limited as to exclude matters which vitally affect the welfare of the people of Canada, then your government must accept the responsibility for the limited results which the conference can achieve. Certainly it seems to me that the items which are listed in my previous letter are the irreducible minimum which ought to be on the agenda of such a conference, but whether extensive or limited it is the firm conviction of the Saskatchewan government that the dominion-provincial conference should be reconvened before some of the difficulties confronting the provincial and municipal governments reach alarming proportions.

May I urge upon you and your colleagues the reconsideration of this whole question. Indications from other provincial governments would lead me to believe that some of them are also vitally concerned lest there be further delays in tackling some of the pressing problems that are the concern of all who are charged with governmental responsibility.

Yours sincerely,

T. C. Douglas