

The weak colonies joined together in 1867 have grown today into a prosperous and dynamic country. That so much could have been accomplished in the face of great difficulties is a tribute to the courage, determination and faith in human progress of countless Canadian men and women of all origins. It is also a tribute to the wisdom and foresight of the Fathers of Confederation who created the constitutional framework without which much of this progress would have been impossible.

Our country was not founded in 1867. It is far more deeply rooted in time than that. But, one hundred years ago, our predecessors—men of many races, creeds and tongues—embarked upon a great exercise in statecraft of which we, today, are the trustees. They laid the foundations. They anchored them in a fundamental sense of unity that generations of conflict had taught was vital to the common weal. With this realization they erected a structure of government for the freedom, welfare, and prosperity of all who might come in time to inhabit this land. They built according to a federal plan because they knew that unity, with cultural and regional diversity could be harnessed to a positive and enriching rôle in no other way.

The concept of Confederation was a call to Canadians to occupy and develop half a continent. In terms of physical effort, it demanded constructive work of a magnitude and in the face of obstacles never before tackled anywhere in the world. In terms of intellectual endeavour, it required the revolutionary application of federal arrangements to a parliamentary system in a sparsely populated country of enormous area.

The path of Confederation has been beset with great difficulties—some natural, some inevitable and some of our own making. Succeeding generations of men and women, however, had the courage to overcome these difficulties and make possible the material and social progress we today enjoy. They had the conviction of their forefathers that a sense of basic unity alone would secure the preservation of both the individuality and the diversity which they cherished. They knew that, while Confederation could never be perfect, it was in the last analysis the mainstay of their various interests and that, while there would inevitably be occasional failures in the tolerance and understanding essential to our political system, a fundamental friendship between our people remained and could be relied upon. They knew, above all, that there was no difference of opinion so great, no misunderstanding so deep, that could prevent men of good will from repairing the particular in order to preserve the whole.

During the past one hundred years the world has changed beyond the recognition of anything within the experience of those who laid the foundations of Confederation. That our constitutional structure has endured and served so well the progress of our country is a measure of the basic soundness of its principles as well as the willingness of those concerned to adapt their application to changing needs and changing conditions.

It is in this spirit that the government has in recent years actively promoted the reform of detailed federal-provincial arrangements which, with the fundamental law, compose the constitutional structure of our country. Such reform includes improving procedures for federal-provincial consultation and coordination that are increasingly vital to the effective operation of modern government.

The government is aware of its unique responsibility to ensure that our fundamental law is readily adaptable to our changing social needs. It is also conscious that the advantages and disadvantages of the present constitutional structure are deeply intertwined. While orderly reform may well be the best way of preserving and strengthening our heritage, the most careful considera-