

*Dominion-Provincial Conference*

The conference was for both observers and participants an educational exercise of considerable importance. I believe we all learned much of the hopes and the complaints, the priorities and the interests, as well as the varying degrees of involvement of the several governments in Canada with this constitutional question. It permitted us all to understand better our mutual and individual problems.

*[Translation]*

As I say this, however, I do not intend to create an impression that our task is over. I am convinced that none of the provincial premiers want such an impression to be left. This conference established, if there were any need to establish, that all provincial governments are resolved, as is the federal government, to improving the economic opportunities of our people. It established that all provincial governments are anxious, as is the federal government, to improve the operation of our federal system. It established that all provincial governments are firm, as is this government, in a commitment to protect fundamental human rights. Of course, agreement has not been reached on the means to achieve this objective, but all heads of government have indicated their willingness to work towards a better protection of human rights. We all acknowledge that the grave difficulties we face are in part the result of oversight, in part the result of errors, but mostly because of our past inability to forecast future events. All omissions past and present were made in good faith. There has been perhaps some incapability to solve complex problems in an industrial society which is experiencing a unique type of federalism.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, in the Canada of 1969 good faith and understanding, fundamental though they are to the continued development of this country, are not by themselves enough. To them must be added other ingredients: energy, discipline, a sense of urgency. The exercise in which we have engaged ourselves—making modern our constitutional framework to permit a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities among the people of Canada—this exercise, is a complicated one. It demands of us the best that our imagination and our experience and our political skills are able to provide.

● (12 noon.)

*[English]*

There were some suggestions at the conference that Canadians face challenges more

[Mr. Trudeau.]

pressing than the reformation and redrafting of our constitution, that our energies would be better expended in seeking solutions, for instance, to current problems which require no constitutional amendment. These arguments are persuasive because they are to a large extent true. It is of little use to draft a new constitution if in the meantime financial pressures upon the many levels of government become unbearable. It is to a degree illusory to speak in terms of a bold new plan for the future if we cannot ease the intolerable conditions of poverty in which too many Canadians now live.

These arguments, I repeat, are persuasive but they are not compelling; nor do I think that they were intended to be compelling. They were intended to remind us of a very important aspect of our labours, but they were not, I believe, made in the sense that constitutional review must take second place. For if we were now to abandon the long-run for the short-run, we would have overlooked an ingredient in our lives which we dare not fail to consider. That ingredient is the future.

Even as we examine our constitution and discuss the current pressures which bear upon all levels of government, we know that there are other pressures which have scarcely been defined, let alone brought under control. The longer these pressures are allowed to continue unchecked, the more difficult will be our task to deal with them. One such difficulty which comes to mind is likely the greatest challenge to the continuation of life on this planet, the problem of environmental pollution.

Our apparent disinterest or lack of action in regard to this problem, as reflected by the widespread lack of serious study and the infrequent attempts at effective controls, may well govern the quality of life in Canada in the last three decades of this century. This challenge of pollution of our rivers and lakes, of our farmlands and forests and of the very air we breathe, cannot be met effectively in our federal state without some constitutional reform or clarification. It is important that we know which level of government is responsible and, if both, in what way they are ready to co-operate through the use of the spending power and other devices to permit these problems to be tackled properly.

I believe this is true of many other problems which are sometimes brought to the attention of this house, problems such as urban renewal of housing and urban transport. These problems cannot be dealt with