

eloquence of D'Arcy McGee or Wilfrid Laurier. I wish my voice could rouse all Canadians to what this moment requires of us all.

This conference seems to be about the same as many others. The weather is about as you would expect at this time of year. People are going about their business as usual. But this is not a usual occasion. It is a critical one, and our decisions will be crucial for Canada.

I was born and bred in Ontario and have never ceased to be proud of that inheritance. Ontario is in many ways central in these discussions - as the most populous province, and the richest, and as the province where there is the longest tradition of living and working together with French Canada. I think of those days after the passage of the Act of Union in 1841, when Kingston was the capital of Canada; when Robert Baldwin was elected to the legislature at a by-election in Quebec and Louis Hippolyte Lafontaine was elected at a by-election in Ontario.

The position of Ontario is central for another reason. More may be asked of it than of any other province in the way of innovation and magnanimity. In its turn, the loss that would be caused by dismemberment would be almost as great for Ontario as it would be for Quebec. Ontario would be weakened and impoverished as a result; so much has the character and flavour of life in English-speaking Eastern Canada depended on our partnership in so many ways with French-Canadians.

This question of what kind of Canada would be left if Quebec were to withdraw from Confederation will be deeply pondered by English-speaking Canadians in every other part of the country as well, even though the tragic results may be less obvious the farther away you move from the Province of Quebec.

Perhaps it is in the Western Provinces that the cardinal problems we must grapple with today are likely to seem most remote. There, the heartland of French Canada is far away. The settlements of French-Canadians are few and infrequent, and life has been deeply coloured by the flow of immigrants from countries other than France or the British Isles.

I would beg Canadians of such different ethnic origins to believe that any proposals of the Federal Government - or indeed of any other government - at this conference are put forward in full recognition of the great contribution they have made to Canadian life, not only in the West but in every other part of Canada; and in full recognition also of the sacrifices they have made to serve and enrich this country. I believe that these other Canadians will find the new course we are proposing for Canada easier to accept and support if they remember that the country to which they have committed themselves and their children, and the country where they have found their freedom, may not endure without a great new act of accommodation. For let me be explicit - what is at stake, in my opinion, is no less than Canada's survival as a nation.