



CANADA

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 68/4

A TIME FOR CRUCIAL DECISIONS

Statement by Prime Minister L.B. Pearson at
the Opening in Ottawa of the Constitutional
Conference on February 5, 1968

There are times in the life of a country when the assurance of good intentions, the discharge of normal duty and acceptance of routine responsibility, are not enough. What such times demand is the exercise of courage and decision that go far beyond the needs of the moment. I believe that this is such a time for Canada. Here the road forks. If we have the resolution and the wisdom to choose the right new course and to follow it steadfastly, I can see few limits to what we may achieve together as a people. But, if we lack the courage to choose or if we choose wrongly, we shall leave to our children, and our children's children a country in fragments, and we ourselves shall have become the failures of Confederation.

Today forces of change are abroad in the world. They are wiping out old landmarks and are making some old traditions seem hardly relevant. I am not wise enough (perhaps no one is wise enough) to know all the causes of these movements of change or to define their direction or their ultimate outcome. But no one can be unaware of their presence on their power. They are to be seen at work within most of our own institutions. They are having a deep, and, at times, a disconcerting, effect on the hopes of the young and on their relation to society. They are leading to a wide search for new patterns of self-fulfilment - a search which governments should encourage and direct so that it can meet new conditions and new aspirations.

These forces of change are having their effect not only on the lives of individuals but on the structure of states; and in all countries. Here in Canada they have been working as solvents on Confederation itself and on the whole pattern of our national life.

In this day, it is folly to think that a country, let alone a province, can be an island unto itself. I have spent much of my life in international negotiation and in attempting to settle international disputes. I think I know as well as most the need to curb national sovereignty in the interests of international order and to work towards the day when there will be an effective world organization covering the globe. But I also know that day is far away. I know that, for a long time to come, there will be a need for states,