

*Dominion-Provincial Conference*

I think it is important to preserve confidence in our ability to solve our problems in Canada. Therefore it was pleasing to me, and I think to Canadians generally, to see the conference conclude in a spirit of cordiality between the Prime Minister of Canada and the premiers who were participating. It must have been reassuring to see the willingness of those participating to continue their work and to try to reach solutions. If the conference did not create solid confidence in our ability to solve our problems, I think it certainly left the people of Canada with the hope that they could be solved. By and large I think the people of this country are going to judge what happens now and what grows out of and develops from this conference.

Those who participated in the conference and the hundreds of thousands, indeed, probably millions, who watched the proceedings on television would probably be hard put to be very specific about what concrete progress was made by the conference. For example, the delegation from Quebec expressed disappointment that the conference was not able to give serious consideration to problems that were paramount to that delegation.

For encouragement it is necessary to rely on the fact that the conference certainly did not destroy confederation, as some perhaps feared might be the case. Most statements of position and exchanges of views were responsible, and such exchanges of views are healthy in themselves. As a result of the conference being held before television cameras there is hopefully, as the Prime Minister expressed it, a better understanding of the country and the various approaches to be taken to Canada's many problems, both long and short term, as well as a better understanding perhaps of the attitudes and motivations of people in different parts of the country.

I think we have to ask ourselves how much longer we can continue to rely upon expressions of good will by participants in these conferences, and upon such conferences concluding with what must be described as a series of generalities without seeming, to the ordinary person at least and to those of us who observed the conference, to involve very substantial progress. As somebody said, Canadians have now seen this movie on three occasions. We who speak after these conferences said much the same thing following the Confederation for Tomorrow Conference, the first federal-provincial conference of last

February, and now this conference. Any agreements that were reached were very general and the more difficult problems, such as the division of powers, the problem of federal spending power and so on, were touched on but not seriously discussed with a view to reaching any conclusions. They were quickly referred, of course, back to committees for study.

The conference certainly was part of the important on-going effort to work out arrangements that will be just and acceptable to Canadians generally and which I hope will be lasting. It is hard to point to any area where concrete progress was made. It is hard to find any area in which it can be said we are really closer to agreement than we were before. There is at least one vital area, that of linguistic rights, where some ground seems to have been lost during the past year, where we seem to be somewhat farther behind than we were.

However, in spite of this the conference avoided the kind of intransigence and confrontation which would have left us fearful about the future of confederation. It avoided too the kind of confrontation that we have seen here this morning and which, frankly, leaves me fearful for the future of confederation. Various premiers, especially the prairie premiers, did not live up to advance billing as the ogres of confederation, an advance billing which at least one premier claimed—I hope he was not correct—was the result of unfair briefings by federal officials. The prairie premiers appeared before the conference as representatives of provinces with grievances and genuine problems, which they presented in a dignified and constructive way, that they related to the health of the country itself. That was the context of their presentation, instead of the narrow, parochial or petty attitude that some had unfairly attributed to them before the conference began.

The premiers stated their grievances and in the end the Prime Minister promised, I think in a joking way, that he would mend his ways. I hope it was not entirely a joke in the sense that I hope the conference really brought home to the Prime Minister and to members of the government the importance of preserving good federal-provincial relations on a day to day basis. To the extent that the Prime Minister was serious in his remark I hope he will persevere in his good intentions as expressed at that time. The opportunity that this conference gave to bring home to