

Appendix

of fact, agreeable and durable memories linger in the minds of those of my colleagues who attended, as well as in my mind.

To my mind, the attitude and opinion of the government of the province of Quebec have been clearly stated, especially during the sessions of the recent conference in Ottawa. I am sure it will not be necessary to repeat the statements I then made on behalf of the province of Quebec.

You will undoubtedly admit that the drafting of an essentially Canadian constitution, studied and decided upon in Canada, by Canadians and for Canadians, is a task of capital importance.

In so far as the province of Quebec is concerned, I believe that the stand we took cannot possibly be ambiguous for anyone.

During the recent conference in Ottawa, all provinces have brought suggestions, taken a stand, expressed opinions. The federal authorities alone neither presented suggestions nor expressed any opinion.

To us, at such conferences, it would appear useful, just and necessary that all participants share their views and suggestions so that the best possible achievements may come from the body of this work. The old proverb is always true which says that light springs from the impact of ideas.

Undeniably the federal authorities have a right to opinions, and even convictions, and we are led to add, most respectfully, that an exchange of opinions and suggestions is not only a federal and a provincial right, but it is a duty arising from the spirit of frank and loyal co-operation that is desired and desirable among the different governments in Canadian confederation.

That is why we would like to know, in order to study them, the opinions and point of view of the federal government.

In the circumstances, you will agree that it is not a question of anyone imposing his views, and that if the federal authorities omitted to voice their opinions and suggestions, they would unfortunately be giving the impression of a lack of co-operation in the working out of a Canadian constitution and of a confederation strongly united in the integral respect of the rights of everyone.

There is no doubt that money is far from holding first place in the scale of values; nevertheless it should not be forgotten that we are living on earth and that financial means are essential to life.

One of the important problems which, in our minds, has to be settled in a precise way so as to prevent any serious dispute, is the problem of the fiscal powers which are indispensable to the various governments. To govern is to foresee, and thus it is necessary to have sources of income with which present as well as future needs may be met.

On many occasions we have suggested what seems to us to be an excellent method of obtaining perfect co-operation.

We are convinced that in spirit and letter the Canadian constitution grants to the provinces a priority at least in matters of direct taxation. However, since there are contrary opinions, which we respect without sharing, there would be an occasion to define clearly, the taxation powers of each and all the authorities of Canadian government.

We believe further that a delimitation beyond question of federal powers and provincial powers is needed even if we are convinced that certain contestation of provincial powers is ill-founded. Also, we believe it advisable to find and establish an appropriate and fair system that would take into account the rights of the ever-ignored taxpayer while maintaining for each government authority the powers essential to a responsible government.

Would you be good enough, Mr. Prime Minister, to let us know the opinions and attitude of the federal authorities on these subjects?

You may be assured that we wish wholeheartedly to co-operate toward the progress and prosperity of the country as well as to the progress and prosperity of the provinces, our province in particular; such a co-operation could only take place, in our minds, on federative bases, with due regard to the elements which are indispensable to responsible government.

As we have stated on several occasions, the delegates of the province of Quebec take part in these Canadian intergovernmental conferences not as leaders of a political party but as representatives of a province; we likewise consider the delegates of Ottawa not as leaders of a political party but as representatives of the federal authority. It is our very sincere desire always to be guided by these principles which seem suitable and appropriate for everyone.

On behalf of the province of Quebec, I take pleasure in renewing the cordial invitation, which I extended, to hold these conferences, or at least some of them, in the old capital which was the cradle of Christian civilization in this land of America and even also the cradle of the Canadian confederation.

Please accept, Mr. Prime Minister, with my salutations, the assurances of my complete devotedness to the highest interests of our country in general and of the province of Quebec in particular.

M. L. Duplessis

Translation:

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
Canada

Ottawa, February 6, 1950

Hon. Maurice L. Duplessis,
Premier of the Province of Quebec,
Parliament Buildings,
Quebec, Que.

My dear Premier:

I acknowledge receipt of your letter of the first of February, concerning the general conference of the federal and provincial governments proposed for early autumn; if there is any misunderstanding as to what I interpreted as being "a unanimous approval of the opportunity of holding a conference on a suitable day of September or October", I hope that such a misunderstanding can be cleared up.

The January conference had a special purpose which was to try to reach an agreement on a procedure for studying and deciding in Canada, in the future, every question concerning amendments to the Canadian constitution. I share your view that this is "a task of capital importance which deserves to be carried out with great care and without ever sacrificing the desired and desirable objective to the temporary and more than dubious advantage of hasty and insufficiently mature decisions".

Apparently, our colleagues of the other provinces also share the same view; I believe this is why we agreed to establish a committee to which every government will impart its views in writing on the best and most practical way of solving the problem. It is the federal government's intention to conform to this.

But there are other problems of interest to both the federal and the provincial authorities. It is with a view to discussing these problems that I made my proposal of a general conference next fall.

The premiers of all the other provinces have expressed their desire to take part in it, and the general tenor of our discussions in January led me to believe that everyone was taking the fall conference for granted, regardless of what progress took place in the constitutional conference. It was