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THE STORY OF CONFEDERATION – A NEW CHAPTER?

In his speech of welcome to the provincial leaders attending the recent Federal-Provincial Conference, which opened in Ottawa on November 26, Prime Minister L.B. Pearson declared that "the success of the conference should not be measured primarily by the number of specific decisions that we make at this first meeting". Observing that "we are building for more than today", Mr. Pearson warned that, while the conference could "shape the direction of Canadian federalism for a generation", it would do so "only if we see the conference as a new beginning".

"...I see this conference," he went on, "as one of a number of meetings, perhaps some of them of different kinds. Improved liaison machinery – which is one of the items on our present agenda – could provide the continuing contact which would prepare the ground for such meetings and make them more fruitful."

The body of Mr. Pearson's opening statement follows in part:

...We have cause to be profoundly grateful that, in adjusting federal-provincial relations to new circumstances and new attitudes, we do so in a country where tolerance, moderation and a capacity for compromise are a part of the very substance of our being. The two great cultures from which our traditions preponderantly, though not exclusively, spring – the French and the British – are noted on the one hand for a practical pragmatism and on the other hand for a clear logic in approach to problems. With such a unique heritage, and with our long traditions of democracy and compromise, we can

surely solve our present problems. If there is any doubt of that, we must indeed have lost many of the qualities that enabled us to create this country in the first place. I am confident we have not.

Our agenda provides for discussion, first, of the economic problems that confront us at this time. There are the problems of achieving a high and consistent rate of economic growth, the problems of employment and of training for employment, the problems of trade in a competitive and changing world. They are all Canada-wide problems, national problems, but they are also all problems with which provincial governments are deeply concerned.

In one case – trade – the jurisdiction is specifically federal. In another – vocational education – it is specifically provincial. But you are properly concerned about the influence of trade policies on industries in each province, just as we are justifiably concerned about the particular aspects of vocational training which have a direct bearing on employment and economic growth in Canada....

The mingling of responsibilities in a federal structure of government is not confined to economic problems. I could take as another example one of the great non-economic problems before our country the problem of relations between English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians. We all agree, I think, that the Federal Government has an important responsibility for bringing about a more perfect equality of opportunity for all Canadians. But it is clear that federal action alone will not suffice for these purposes. Much of the action which would achieve greater equality lies in the area of provincial jurisdiction.

(Over)