

16

STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE WILLIAM G. DAVIS
PRIME MINISTER OF ONTARIO
TO THE OPENING SESSION OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE
VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA,
MONDAY, JUNE 14, 1971

ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE OF ONTARIO, I AM DELIGHTED TO HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO CONGRATULATE BRITISH COLUMBIA ON THE OCCASION OF ITS CENTENNIAL. MY RECOLLECTION OF ANOTHER CENTENNIAL YOU HAD IN 1958 SIMPLY CONFIRMS AN IMPRESSION I HAVE LONG HELD ABOUT THIS SPECTACULAR PROVINCE. ANY PROVINCE THAT MANAGES TWO CENTENNIALS IN A CENTURY IS MOST DEFINITELY NOT A PROVINCE LIKE THE OTHERS. HOWEVER, THIS IS NO TIME TO QUIBBLE. CELEBRATING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ENTRY OF A PROVINCE INTO CONFEDERATION CALLS FOR OUR SHARING YOUR CELEBRATIONS. WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR YOUR HAVING INVITED US TO DO SO.

I KNOW ONTARIANS WERE PLEASED WITH THE SPLENDID RECEPTION WHICH THE PEOPLE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA GAVE THE QUEEN AND MEMBERS OF HER FAMILY DURING THEIR RECENT VISIT TO THIS PROVINCE. AND I HOPE IT IS NOT OUT OF ORDER, MR. BENNETT, IF I SAY THAT THE WELCOME WHICH YOU HAVE ACCORDED US AT THE OUTSET OF THIS CONFERENCE IS SIMILARLY REGAL AND MAJESTIC.

IN THE SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF THIS CENTENNIAL, OUR REASON FOR BEING HERE AND OUR DELIBERATIONS THIS WEEK ARE PARTICULARLY MEANINGFUL. PERSONALLY, I AM SURE THAT THIS HAPPY COINCIDENCE AUGURS WELL FOR THE OUTCOME OF THE DISCUSSIONS WHICH WE WILL HAVE HERE OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS.

AS A MATTER OF FACT, I CANNOT HELP BEING REMINDED OF ANOTHER TIME AT WHICH A SIMILAR MEETING TOOK PLACE OVER 100 YEARS AGO ON ANOTHER ISLAND AND IN ANOTHER PROVINCIAL CAPITAL OF OUR COUNTRY. I AM REFERRING, OF COURSE, TO THE SUMMER OF 1864, WHEN THE FATHERS OF CONFEDERATION MET IN CHARLOTTETOWN, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND. I AM SURE WE ALL HOPE THAT THE SAME POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE AND OUTCOME WHICH CHARACTERIZED THAT MEETING ON A LOVELY ISLAND IN THE EAST WILL BE MATCHED IN THE COURSE OF OUR DISCUSSIONS ON THIS BEAUTIFUL ISLAND IN THE WEST.

THE PHYSICAL SETTING OF THIS WESTERNMOST PROVINCE IS SUCH THAT ONE CAN READILY UNDERSTAND WHY SO MANY CANADIANS FIND IT SO ATTRACTIVE. IN THIS CONNECTION, MR. BENNETT, YOU MIGHT PARTICULARLY APPRECIATE THE FACT THAT I WAS GUIDED IN MY PREPARATIONS FOR THIS CONFERENCE BY A MOST USEFUL BOOKLET OF ADVICE. IT WAS ISSUED IN 1873 BY THE GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA'S AGENT-GENERAL IN LONDON FOR PROSPECTIVE EMIGRANTS. TO ME, HOWEVER, ITS MESSAGE SOUNDS ASTONISHINGLY UP-TO-DATE. YOU MAY JUDGE THAT YOURSELF FROM THE FOLLOWING, SAMPLE QUOTATION

IF A MAN BE RESTLESS AND DISSATISFIED ABOUT HIS OWN FUTURE AND THAT OF HIS CHILDREN, IF HIS MIND BE BOWED DOWN BY CARE AND ANXIETY, LET HIM CONSIDER BRITISH COLUMBIA. HIS MIND, BOWED DOWN IN HIS PRESENT STATE, WILL RECOVER ITS NATURAL INDEPENDENCE AND JOY. IF HE SETS TO WORK RESOLUTELY AND IS SOBER AND CAREFUL, HE WILL NEVER REGRET THE CHANGE IN LIFE HE HAS MADE.

IT IS REMARKABLE, SIR, THAT 100 YEARS LATER YOU AND MANY OTHER BRITISH COLUMBIANS STILL PROMOTE THE BENEFITS OF YOUR PROVINCE IN ALMOST THE SAME WORDS, AND CERTAINLY WITH THE SAME JUSTIFIABLE PRIDE AND OPTIMISM.

IN A MORE SERIOUS VEIN, MR. CHAIRMAN, WE LOOK FORWARD TO THREE PRODUCTIVE DAYS. WE ARE ASSEMBLED HERE TO FIND APPROPRIATE WORDS WHICH WILL BEST RE-AFFIRM THE VALUES WHICH WE PRIZE MOST HIGHLY, AND TO WEAVE THEM INTO A MORE CONTEMPORARY CONSTITUTION. THIS WAS THE CHALLENGE TAKEN UP SEVERAL YEARS AGO WHEN THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW WAS INAUGURATED. SPEAKING FOR ONTARIO, WE INTEND TO MEET THAT CHALLENGE DURING OUR DELIBERATIONS HERE.

IN ONE SENSE, THIS CONFERENCE SHOULD CULMINATE SOME OF THE WORK BEGUN IN FEBRUARY, 1968, AT THE FIRST FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE. THAT CONFERENCE SET UP THE MACHINERY FOR THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW, AND IDENTIFIED A NUMBER OF PRIORITY AREAS FOR STUDY. THE FIRST MINISTERS FOCUSED THEIR ATTENTION ON MANY OF THOSE AREAS LAST FEBRUARY, NOTABLY POLITICAL RIGHTS, LANGUAGE RIGHTS, THE SUPREME COURT, REGIONAL DISPARITIES, FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CONSULTATION, AND AN AMENDING PROCEDURE. WE WILL BE EXAMINING THESE AND SEVERAL OTHER MATTERS IN FINER DETAIL THIS WEEK.

IN ANOTHER SENSE, HOWEVER, THE STAGE WE HAVE REACHED IS BUT ANOTHER STEP IN THE GOAL SET AT THE CONFEDERATION OF TOMORROW CONFERENCE HELD IN TORONTO IN NOVEMBER, 1967. AT THAT TIME, THE GOVERNMENTS OF ALL TEN PROVINCES SAT DOWN TO CONSIDER A MUCH BROADER PROBLEM THAN SIMPLY FORMAL CHANGES TO OUR WRITTEN CONSTITUTION. THEY WERE CONCERNED THEN NOT WITH SPECIFIC PROPOSALS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE, BUT WITH THE CHARACTER OF OUR FEDERAL SYSTEM, AND WITH THE WIDER AIMS OF CANADIAN CONFEDERATION AS WE MOVED INTO THE SECOND CENTURY OF OUR NATIONAL EXISTENCE. THAT SURELY REMAINS OUR CONTINUING CONCERN.

AT THE CONFEDERATION OF TOMMOROW CONFERENCE, FISCAL MATTERS WERE DELIBERATELY EXCLUDED, ALTHOUGH IT WAS RECOGNIZED THEN, AS NOW, THAT THE ORDERLY MANAGEMENT OF SUCH MATTERS IS CRUCIAL TO THE EFFECTIVE FUNCTIONING OF OUR FEDERATION. WE HAVE CARRIED FORWARD THESE MATTERS IN A SEPARARE FORUM WHILE AT THE SAME TIME DISCUSSING MORE STRICTLY CONSTITUTIONAL PROBLEMS IN THIS CONFERENCE.

MY PURPOSE IN RECALLING THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF FOUR YEARS AGO IS TO PUT OUR DELIBERATIONS HERE INTO A PERSPECTIVE LONG HELD BY ONTARIO. AT THAT TIME WE SPONSORED A CONFERENCE TO SPOTLIGHT THE NUMEROUS ISSUES WHICH WE SENSED WERE TROUBLING EVERY PROVINCE AND REGION OF CANADA. THESE ISSUES, AS THE CONFERENCE DEMONSTRATED, WILL REQUIRE VARIOUS AND SKILLFUL SOLUTIONS. SOME OF THEM ARE TO BE CONSIDERED HERE, IN TERMS OF CHANGES TO OUR WRITTEN CONSTITUTION. OTHERS WILL BE DISCUSSED NEXT MONTH WHEN THE MINISTERS OF FINANCE AND TREASURERS MEET TO CONSIDER OUR ECONOMIC SITUATION AND OUR TAXATION SYSTEM. MORE WILL HAVE TO BE DISCUSSED IN THIS AND OTHER FORUMS.

ONE'S VIEW OF ALL THESE PROBLEMS IS LIKELY TO BE DIFFERENT DEPENDING ON WHERE IN CANADA ONE LIVES. HOWEVER, THE FACT THAT THIS COUNTRY HAS A VARIETY OF REGIONAL INTERESTS AND VIEWPOINTS SHOULD NOT, IN MY OPINION, BE CONSIDERED A LIABILITY. ON THE CONTRARY, IT SHOULD SERVE TO EMPHASIZE THE NEED FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND SENSITIVITY AMONG CANADIANS AS WELL AS FOR FLEXIBLE SOLUTIONS TO MEET THE DIFFERING REQUIREMENTS OF CANADA'S REGIONS. IN SAYING THIS, I WANT TO EMPHASIZE THAT IN SPEAKING FOR ONTARIO, OUR INTENT REMAINS TO CONCERN OURSELVES WITH THE HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT OF OUR WHOLE COUNTRY AS WELL AS WITH THAT OF OUR PROVINCE. I BELIEVE THAT IF WE RECOGNIZE OUR DIVERSITY, AND BUILD OUR POLICIES AROUND IT RATHER THAN AGAINST IT, WE WILL STRENGTHEN THE BONDS OF OUR FEDERATION.

A CENTURY AGO, FACED WITH THE INDIVIDUALITY OF THE FOUR ORIGINAL PROVINCES, THE FATHERS OF CONFEDERATION WISELY CHOSE TO ESTABLISH CANADA AS A FEDERAL COUNTRY. IN SOME WAYS, THE STRUCTURE THEY SET UP HAS STOOD THE TESTS OF TIME AND CHANGE EXTREMELY WELL. IN MANY OTHER WAYS HOWEVER, THE PRESSING FORCES OF DEVELOPMENT, WAR, DEPRESSION, AND PLAIN INERTIA HAVE MADE US FAR LESS SENSITIVE TO THE NEED FOR CHANGE IN DRASTICALLY ALTERED TIMES AND CONDITIONS.

IT WAS IN THE 1960's, AS SOCIAL TENSIONS INCREASED, COSTS SPIRALLED, AND CONSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES REMAINED STATIC THAT THE NEED FOR CHANGE BECAME ACUTELY APPARENT. IT WAS THEN THAT WE FACED THIS QUESTION AND EMBARKED DELIBERATELY ON THE ADMITTEDLY INTROSPECTIVE, BUT I THINK MOST NECESSARY, EXERCISE OF CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW. THAT WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SIT DOWN AND IN RELATIVE CALM DISCUSS OUR PROBLEMS TOGETHER HAS BEEN NO MEAN FEAT. BUT HAVING HELD THESE VITAL, PRELIMINARY DISCUSSIONS, I ALSO BELIEVE WE MUST NOW ACT.

THROUGHOUT THIS EXERCISE, ONTARIO'S MAIN CONCERN HAS BEEN, AND SHALL CONTINUE TO BE, TO DEVISE A FEDERALISM WHICH WORKS BETTER BY GIVING TO ALL OF ITS PARTNERS THE CAPACITY TO CARRY OUT THOSE RESPONSIBILITIES ASSIGNED TO THEM BY THE CONSTITUTION. THE WHOLE REASON FOR OUR FEDERALISM IS TO PERMIT DIFFERENT GOVERNMENTS TO PERFORM MOST EFFICIENTLY THE MANY DIFFERENT SERVICES DEMANDED BY CANADIANS IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE COUNTRY.

IF THIS REQUIRES A REALLOCATION OF FUNDS, THEN THAT SHOULD BE DONE. IF IT REQUIRES MORE EFFECTIVE FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CONSULTATION, THEN THAT SHOULD BE DONE. IF IT REQUIRES A REDISTRIBUTION OF CONSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES, THEN WE HAVE NO HESITATION ABOUT DOING THIS. LET US JUST GET ON WITH THE JOB.

IT IS WITH THIS VIEW IN MIND THAT ONTARIO RECOGNIZES THAT THIS CONFERENCE REPRESENTS ONLY PHASE ONE OF OUR EFFORT TO COPE WITH SOME OF THE PROBLEMS WHICH BESET CANADA TODAY. AS SUCH, WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT IT DESERVES OUR UTMOST ATTENTION AND OUR CLOSEST CONSIDERATION. MOREOVER, WE ARE SURE THAT A SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION TO THIS MEETING WILL MARK A POSITIVE BEGINNING TO TACKLING THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE, NAMELY, THE BEST AND MOST EFFECTIVE MATCHING OF REVENUES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

MR. CHAIRMAN, WHEN WE HAVE SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED OUR TASKS BOTH AT THIS MEETING AND IN THE NEXT STAGE OF THE REVIEW, THEN I AM HOPEFUL THAT WE WILL HAVE LAID THE BASIS FOR A FEDERATION THAT FUNCTIONS EFFECTIVELY, AND BETTER SUITS THE ASPIRATIONS OF ALL CANADIANS.