

STATEMENT BY

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PREMIER OF NEW BRUNSWICK

CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE

VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Mr. Chairman:

This historic meeting is appropriately being held in British Columbia in the centenary year. The entry of British Columbia into the confederation united the colony of the west with the cultures and languages of the east into a nation truly extending from sea to sea. The vision was bold; the doomsayers many; the obstacles to success appeared insurmountable.

We witness today the greatness and vitality of this province; we know the greatness and vitality of the nation. The impenetrable odds were thrust aside in the building of the nation. British Columbia had an historic part in making it so.

Prime Minister Bennett, the people and the government of New Brunswick extend a greeting to the people and government of British Columbia in this centennial year; we extend a special greeting to you, Prime Minister Bennett, and to Lieutenant Governor Nicholson, for you are distinguished sons of New Brunswick and over the years you have remembered the province of your birth.

Mr. Chairman, vision does not belong to a single generation or a moment in time.

The forces present at the founding of this nation were economic stress, language and cultural diversity, communication disadvantages and the need for a viable form of government that would enable the colonies to remain and grow in independence. The obstacles of administrative difficulty, of distance, of cost and misunderstanding were also present. The requirements for success were found in a federal system to carry out national economic and political objectives while assuring room for diversity.

The institution, the laws and the arrangements
were backed by a determination to succeed -- a desire to
make it work. Canada has justified its creation, surpassed
the expectations, and enabled diversity to flourish. The
fact of Canada is irrepressible as we approach our
deliberations at this conference. In a land whose vastness
few countries exceed, and whose resources none may exceed,
we must preserve our common institutions, and extend our
common rights and responsibilities; for in the vicissitudes of
life, Canada has carried on where provinces might not have
survived either with respect or viability.

In perspective, the problems we face at this Conference are not new; the requirements for success are not new. What is new is a contemporary dimension requiring a broader statement of our national characteristics, purposes and objectives.

Canada, Mr. Chairman, is not on the table for speculation at this Conference, and we must not approach the future in any narrow provincial sense. The problems we seek to solve do not diminish the nation.

In positive terms, the purpose of these deliberations is to redefine our objectives and to strengthen the nation so that our people in every province may prosper and remain united in the assurance of respect and their national independence.

I have spoken in this vein at the opening of this Conference because New Brunswick intends to be counted in: we are proud of Canada, and we are not impatient because in the many months of deliberations instant solutions have not appeared. We believe these discussions should not be downgraded in importance, jeopardized by impatience, or

I have said on other occasions that the participation of New Brunswick in these discussions has been prefaced, as it continues to be, on the unity and integrity of the nation, on a federalism designed to give full play to the energies and aspirations of Canadians, on a central government able to achieve national cohesion, and on provincial governments with powers and resources to carry on their needs and responsibilities. In the complexities of today's life, we do not regard the existing allocations of power as immutable.

New Brunswick is a province that is officially bilingual by choice.

We fully support the consensus reached at earlier conferences on linguistic matters.

New Brunswick is a province that, in the century since confederation, has been almost continually depressed and brutally poor - unemployment may run as high as 19% of the labour force.

We fully support effective power in the federal government to alleviate regional disparities; and we fully support the alleviation of regional disparity as a national objective.

New Brunswick is a province that believes in the fundamental freedoms of man; we fully support the consensus reached at previous conferences on the entrenchment of the freedoms.

New Brunswick is a province where the standards of services fall below any acceptable levels; we fully support equal standards of living and approximately equal standards of services as national objectives.

New Brunswick has at past conferences proposed an amending formula that would be flexible, and has fully supported the repatriation of the constitution.

We do so again.

The objectives of acknowledged freedoms for others, of equal respect for the linguistic rights of others, and of an equality of opportunity for each in the economic, cultural and social life of the nation - such are the objectives that New Brunswick seeks and supports, together with an amending formula and the repatriation of the constitution.

For New Brunswick this Conference is important.

In this century of Confederation, concern is with human dignity, with man in his environment and with individual values, we regard the constitution both as an acceptance of responsibility as well as a commitment of jurisdiction; for us the constitution is a framework for action.

In all parts of Canada, there are problems of unemployment, of poverty, of shortages of money, of pollution, of technological change as well as of the soaring costs of welfare, education, medicare and other services.

In New Brunswick the burden of cost is more difficult to bear and the capacity to deal with the problems is less - severely and uniquely less - than in all of the provinces west of New Brunswick.

We know that measures can be taken to raise standards of services, to alleviate poverty, to create greater economic equality and to fashion and preserve a more liveable environment; if the problems are vast, so too is the store of resources and of techniques.

For New Brunswick at this time the first crucial matter is settlement of the framework for action. We seek a constitution without ifs or buts on federal power to ensure acceptable standards of services in our province and without ifs or buts on federal power to provide with us the policies and remedies so clearly required to meet our unique problems; we seek a clear commitment to the alleviation of regional disparity as a national objective.

As I look back over the problems, over the discussions and over the goodwill of plain Canadians, I am convinced that agreement is possible now and, having regard to the realities we face, would be considered by men everywhere as sound and acceptable.

In the Maritime Provinces, we are giving exploratory consideration to the question of union; we have taken steps to formalize our efforts. We intend to work together in the most positive way to meet the negative forces of disunity and disparity.

As First Ministers in Canada we are at the centre of national life: let us accept this opportunity of working together in the most positive way to meet the negative forces of disunity and disparity in the nation. I am confident that we can do so and that we will do so.

Canada, Mr. Chairman, belongs to each of us.