

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE  
OF  
FIRST MINISTERS

Press Release on  
British Columbia's Constitutional Proposals  
October 17, 1978

Ottawa  
October 30-November 1, 1978

THE PREMIER'S OFFICE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

VICTORIA, B.C. -- Oct. 17, 1978 -- British Columbia Premier Bill Bennett today called for sweeping constitutional changes in Canada to enable British Columbia to assume its rightful place within the Canadian federal system.

"I wish it to be known in no uncertain terms that British Columbia is dissatisfied with the importance given to it within our present system... that situation must change," the Premier said as he released the proposals that British Columbia will take to the constitutional summit in Ottawa at the end of this month.

"The present difficulties within our federal system will not be resolved through minor tinkering. Major changes to the central institutions of federalism such as the Senate of Canada, the Supreme Court of Canada, major federal boards and commissions and to the distribution of parliament are necessary so that they will properly take into account the concerns of the various regions that go to make up the country.

"These comprehensive proposals are not solely designed to redress British Columbia's grievances with confederation. They propose new arrangements designed to meet the needs and aspirations of Canadians from all parts of Canada so that we might go on to attain the great destiny to which Canada is called," the Premier said.

"I intend to advance these proposals with full vigor at the First Minister's Conference on the constitution set for Ottawa at the end of the month."

Some major points in British Columbia's nine-document submission are as follows:

- A reformed senate with members appointed by the provincial governments to play a strong role in certain defined federal provincial issues.
- Equal regional representation in the senate from the five regions of Canada - Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairie and Pacific.
- Embodiment of the Supreme Court of Canada in the constitution, with judges drawn from the five regions and appointed by the reformed senate.
- Improved mechanisms to eliminate present ad-hoc federal provincial arrangements.
- Principles for restructuring the distribution of powers between both levels of government.
- An amending formula for the Canadian constitution, based on a five-region Canada and determined by a vote in a reformed senate.
- No diminishing role for the monarchy in Canada.

Mr. Bennett said that in constitutional terms, British Columbia is given little more weight relatively speaking than it was given when it entered confederation in 1871 and that situation must change.

"Too often, the provinces, British Columbia included, have sat back and only reacted to federal proposals on constitutional matters and other matters. The British Columbia proposals which I am making public are not reacting to the federal proposals contained in Bill C 60. They were in process of preparation a long time prior to Bill C 60.

"They represent what in British Columbia's view are necessary to bring this province into the mainstream, in constitutional terms, of our place in Canadian federalism," the Premier said. "The distribution of power between the provincial and federal levels of government remains virtually unaltered since 1867 and therefore is silent dealing with the technological area of importance which has come to the fore in recent years.

"In this respect the constitution is out of tune with contemporary needs and is silent on many modern day subject matters of high priority to government.

"My government has developed this comprehensive set of constitutional proposals to provide creative yet realistic solutions towards a better and more united Canada. I happen to believe that constitution making is not the private preserve of the Federal Government. The Prime Minister has assured me that every opportunity will be afforded for a thorough discussion of the proposal at the conference at the end of the month. British Columbia looks forward to the genuine process of negotiation and consultation that has been promised."