

equitable for regions and for minorities. It is said that investigation is one area where the present Senate has shown a commendable degree of independence from the executive. In recent years the Senate has investigated a number of important public issues, including poverty, the mass media, unemployment, inflation, aging, land use, science policy, national defence, relations with the United States and the proposed national security agency. The recommendations of Senate committees have frequently influenced public policy and have resulted in legislative and administrative action.

### **The focus of recent reform proposals**

While a few witnesses recommended reform of the House of Commons, the great majority argued for reform of the Senate. This was partly because they recognized that the introduction of an element of proportional representation in the electoral system, which is seen by some as an alternative to Senate reform, appears to have been rejected by the national political parties. However, it is also because that alternative would not likely satisfy the demand of the less populous provinces for a way of mitigating the numerical dominance of the Commons by representatives from Ontario and Quebec. A further reason is that the Commons will continue to be subject to tight party discipline, whereas party discipline can be less strict in the Senate, because that chamber can be designed so that it does not control the fate of the government.

In the latter part of the 1970s many proposals for Senate reform envisaged giving the provincial governments direct representation as a means of accommodating regional interests, but very few witnesses who appeared before our Committee advocated this course. Their proposals concentrated instead on representing the views of the people of Canada's provinces and territories in the Senate. One important consequence of this development is that there has been increased interest in the possibility of a directly-elected Senate. It is an option that is attractive particularly to those who wish to give the Senate added political authority.

After so many abortive attempts at Senate reform, witnesses asserted that the time has come for vigorous action — for fundamental change in the Senate — and that it would be a mistake to adopt inconsequential reforms.

The options for Senate reform are examined in more detail in Chapter 5. In the next chapter, we consider the question of what the future role of the Senate should be and examine the objectives of Senate reform.