

discipline imposes on the independence of senators; and the fact that the present distribution of seats does not reflect the growth of western Canada's population. It is argued that all these deficiencies have seriously hindered the effective functioning of the Senate.

However, the more recent arguments for Senate reform — notably those made to our Committee — have focused on achieving one of the original goals of the Senate: the protection and representation of regional interests. These arguments spring from a belief that Parliament needs a chamber that represents those interests with more political authority than can be achieved with a Senate appointed in the present way.

Witnesses suggested that this concern has its foundations in the emergence in Canada of regional pressures which, while they are not new, have become particularly acute. The intensification of Quebec's persisting concern with its autonomy has been one of the principal elements behind these pressures. Another has been the developing consciousness in the West of its growing strength. It is the perception of many people who live in the western provinces, and of some who live in the eastern provinces, that their views are not given sufficient weight in the decisions of the national government.

The principal complaint the Committee encountered was that federal institutions as they are now constructed are unable to express and mediate regional concerns. Although the Senate was originally designed to give the regions a weighted voice in Parliament's decisions, it is argued that this does not happen. Witnesses pointed out that regional interests are now forced to seek outlets through other means, often through provincial governments, and that this has helped to bedevil federal-provincial relations.

Those who argue for Senate reform, or for the reform of the House of Commons, say that institutional change can help the Canadian political system adapt to the new regional pressures. They do not argue that such change would solve all regional problems falling within federal competence. Rather the purpose would be to provide a better framework within which regional differences can be represented, debated and reconciled — a framework that gives the people of all provinces and territories a feeling that their views are given proper weight.

We were urged by almost all witnesses to ensure that our recommendations preserve and reinforce the capacity of the Senate to carry out those functions at which it has been most successful — improving legislation and investigating issues of public policy. It is universally acknowledged that the Senate makes a useful contribution to the work of Parliament in carrying out these functions. With reference to both private and public bills, the Senate holds public committee hearings that are especially effective because the Senate has members with specialized knowledge and considerable experience and who are for the most part — particularly in committee — inclined to be less politically partisan than members of the House of Commons.

Investigation is potentially a very important role for a reformed Senate. Senate committees can look into any number of subjects of public interest: the need for new legislation, the adequacy of existing legislation, the performance of the executive and the bureaucracy and, perhaps most important, the extent to which federal policies are