

our version of a worldwide phenomenon, then the séparatistes in Québec will not convince their francophone compatriots that theirs is an exotic and unique malaise. The essence of Québec séparatisme is the manifestation of a worldwide phenomenon.

But the challenge is not thereby less great because what is required is a fundamental reassessment of our values, a fundamental reassessment of what Canada means to each one of us and of what kind of Canada we want.

How far are we ready to go to restructure our society?

To define the symptoms, we may need to continue our sessions of organized, structured "collective self-analysis" in conferences and task forces. We need this debate and dialogue between the various interests. We should continue to have both experts and lawyers taking a thorough look at our Constitution to see whether or not changes are needed and, if so, to say what changes. I hope that the matter of constitutional amendment will be addressed in this debate by our learned colleague, Senator Forsey, and others.

All these elements—debate, dialogue, analysis and reform—are important ones in defining the problems, but a lasting remedy will only come through the political process and from people-participation in the political process. If the frustration and the alienation we have been speaking of are real, then more people will voluntarily become involved in the political process to take advantage of an opportunity most of our fellow human beings on this planet do not have.

I believe the pressures of this populist phenomenon have already been transformed into political reality. Studies show that until recently only 10 to 20 per cent of the population really engaged in any way in the political process. In saying that I am referring to engagement ranging all the way from engagement in political campaigns, at the ballot box, as candidates in federal, provincial or municipal "legislatures", organized participation through political parties or voluntary associations, and consultative participation.

● (1430)

The consultative participation is particularly important as evidence of the growing expectation that interested groups have a right to be consulted, and the realization by governments that they need to be consulted. Of course, the immediacy of some decisions makes prolonged consultation impossible, but many, if not most, of the decisions taken can and should involve consultation with the people whose rights and lives are being affected. The pipeline hearings are dramatic evidence of this trend. So is the practice established some years ago by the government to extend the process of consultation by the use of white papers, royal commission inquiries and the presentation of briefs to the cabinet.

More such participatory action helps close the alienation gap and engages citizens in the political process in every way, including party political activity and participation in and between elections. Such activity would bring us genuinely to grips with the essence of our particular version of this worldwide phenomenon, the separatist movement in Quebec.

That "problem", as it is called, only genuinely commanded our attention after a hundred years of "concern" because of a political event, the Quebec election of November 15, 1976. Then, through the political process—not by referendum, not by editorials, not by dialogue, not by conference, not by learned articles, not by constitutional amendment, but by the only truly significant political event in a democracy, an election—a political party capable of bringing about separatism took power. While it is true that it did not win that power on a separatist platform, it is there, in power, as a result of a political event. Only an equivalent political event removing it from, or confirming it in, power will deal directly with the question of national unity.

Honourable senators, I have a few words to say about the Senate. If we are looking at a worldwide phenomenon demanding fundamental re-examination of our society, our values and our institutions, what is the Senate's role in that process?

Since its origin as a founding institution of Confederation, with the duty to protect provincial and minority rights, the Senate has evolved into an institution doing more than that. The Senate has exercised its duty to apply sober second thought to legislation, and has at the same time evolved a highly effective committee system—probably the part of the Senate's work that is unanimously admired and respected.

As is to be expected, and indeed encouraged in a free country, the Senate's work has been the subject of criticism, and there has been a recurring and sometimes strident cry for Senate reform, a cry that comes from outside the Senate itself.

Meanwhile the Senate's work has continued, and an important part of its committee work has been the very examination and study of changing Canadian social, political and economic values. Its excellent reports on those subjects to the nation have played, and continue to play, an important role in our country's life. Who, then, is better able to weigh and evaluate proposals for Senate reform than the Senate itself through the work of a special committee?

What I am proposing, honourable senators, for your earnest consideration, is the establishment of a committee of the Senate to study proposals for Senate reform, wherever they may come from and whatever they may be. The committee and the Senate can then report to Canadians, as it has done on many other important Canadian issues, how the Senate itself feels it can best serve fundamental, social and political changes that world and Canadian institutions require for the next twenty-five years of Her Gracious Majesty's reign.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Marchand: Honourable senators, first of all I would like to congratulate my colleague, Senator Frith. By the same token, I would like to include all the names he mentioned at the beginning as those people who in this house, if you like, make a daily worthy contribution. I will not repeat the names but I wholeheartedly agree.

Honourable senators, for the past year, probably like many Canadians, I have been trying to understand what was going on in the country. I read just about everything that can be