

CHAPTER 1

The Committee's Conclusions

We have concluded that the Canadian Senate should be elected directly by the people of Canada.

An appointed Senate no longer meets the needs of the Canadian federation. An elected Senate is the only kind of Senate that can adequately fill what we think should be its principal role — the role of regional representation. We propose a Senate different in composition and function from the House of Commons and from the present Senate. The second chamber we recommend is designed specifically — by its distribution of seats, by the way it is elected, and by the powers it exercises — to represent the sometimes diverse interests of the people of Canada's provinces and territories in federal legislation and federal policies.

In fulfilling that role, an elected Senate would strengthen the authority of Parliament to speak and act on behalf of Canadians in all parts of the country.

We reached this conclusion after reviewing the work of previous inquiries into the question of Senate reform and after hearing the testimony of witnesses in all provincial and territorial capitals. We also benefited from the advice contained in the more than 280 briefs submitted to the Committee. We were told frequently that, after so many abortive attempts at Senate reform, the time has come for vigorous action — for fundamental change in the Senate — and that it would be a mistake to adopt inconsequential reforms.

Our conclusion was not reached lightly or easily. Although a substantial part of the testimony we heard favoured direct election, a roughly equal part opposed it, mainly on the grounds that a parliament with two elected houses cannot be reconciled comfortably with the principle of responsible government as it has operated in the British and Canadian traditions. Some highly respected people in public life and in the academic community prefer a reformed system of appointment to election. Among this group is one member of our Committee.

Although a reformed appointed Senate could bring about some needed improvements, we are persuaded that it would lack the political mandate to fill what we