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Unity Task Force recommends enlarged Commons and new upper house

The addition of 60 new members to the House of Commons, elected from lists drawn up by each party before an election, is one of 75 recommendations of the Task Force on Canadian Unity, published on January 25. Each party would elect members in proportion to the popular vote received in the election.

The entrenchment of French- and English-language rights in a new Constitution and the replacement of the Senate with a House of Federation are also in the recommendations of the group headed by former federal Cabinet minister Jean-Luc Pepin and former Ontario premier John Robarts. The eight-member task force was created in July 1977 "to obtain and publicize the views of Canadians regarding the state of their country, and to provide the ideas and initiatives of the Task Force on the question of Canadian unity".

Other recommendations include:

- A new upper house, to be called the Council of the Federation, composed of 60 members appointed by the provincial governments. The council, which would have no power in matters solely of federal concern, could delay or block measures impinging on provincial jurisdiction and would approve appointments to the Supreme Court and federal agencies.

- Quebecers should be given the right to determine their own political future, including voting for independence, without outside interference.

- Retention of the constitutional monarchy.

- Enlargement of the Supreme Court to 11 from nine members, with five civil law judges instead of the present three. The court would be divided into three benches: for provincial and federal jurisdictions and for constitutional cases.

- A new constitutional amending procedure, calling for approval by both Houses of Parliament and a Canada-wide referendum with majorities in each of four regions — the Atlantic provinces, Quebec, Ontario and the western provinces.

- A declaration of rights in the Constitution, including political, legal, economic and linguistic rights for the education of children in the minority language where numbers warrant.

- A new distribution of powers, clarifying the roles of the federal and provincial governments to minimize overlapping of jurisdiction.

- Special powers for Quebec in the field of culture that other provinces could use or delegate to the Federal Government.

- Entrenchment in the Constitution programs for disadvantaged provinces.

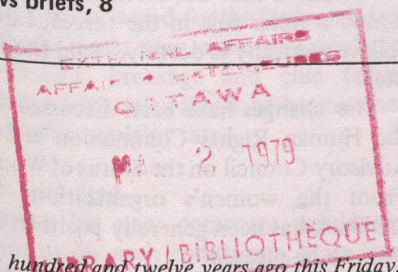
- Support for federal bilingualism policies, but rejection of entrenched linguistic guarantees within provincial jurisdiction unless approved by the provinces concerned.

Respecting diversity

Under the heading "cultural policy" the task force report says in part:

"...the key element of any cultural policy for Canada must be the full recognition of the cultural distinctiveness of Quebec, and the essential role of the provincial government in protecting and nourishing it. This distinctiveness should be recognized formally in the preamble of the Constitution. The text of the Constitution should ensure that the government of Quebec has the powers it requires to protect and develop its French heritage. Although the task force is of the opinion that the importance of this cultural domain in most provinces of English-speaking Canada is not yet as vital as it is to Quebec, a Constitution should make provision for the future.

"If the urgency of the situation in Quebec requires immediate attention, the evolution of Canadian regionalism may very well reach the point at which the provincial governments of English Canada are looked to for leadership in the field of culture in the way the provincial government of Quebec is now. Thus in Chapter 7 we suggest that all the provinces be given



One hundred and twelve years ago this Friday... Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first prime minister, married Susan Bernard in London. He was 52 years old and a widower.

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