

Speech From the Throne

Last July 1st, when Her Majesty came to celebrate Canada Day with us, she said that the unity of the Canadian people is the paramount issue we face, just as it was at the time of Confederation. And, she went on, "There is no force, except the force of will, to keep Canadians together." I believe that Canadians have that will.

I am confident that, as long as we adhere to the values on which this country was founded—belief in human dignity, respect for differences, civility in our dealings with each other—we cannot fail.

Canada's history is the history of builders and achievers. Together, Canadian men and women have created a society that is as free and fair as any on earth; ours is one of the oldest functioning democracies, a beacon of freedom to people everywhere. Around the world, Canada is respected for the constructive role we play in global affairs, for the protection we accord human rights, for our tolerance of diversity, for our environmental sensitivity, and for our cultural accomplishments.

Canada is also envied for our economic prosperity; we rank only thirty-first in population but we have built the world's eighth largest economy. That economic strength allows us to maintain some of the most advanced social programs in the world.

Millions of people around the world would gladly give up everything they have for the privilege of living in Canada. That is a reality and a response to those who would question the value of Canadian citizenship.

Canada will celebrate its 125th birthday during this session. Let us ensure this celebration will be looked back upon as a milestone on the road to a united and prosperous future. Let us mark the occasion with the same spirit of confidence and the sense of accomplishment with which we all commemorated Canada's Centennial and Expo 67. We believed then that the potential of Canada was unparalleled. It remains so now.

To realize our great promise, we must rebuild Canadian unity and overcome the acrimony, apathy and incomprehension that currently undermine it. In light of the global economic revolution of the past quarter century, we must make the reforms necessary to earn the prosperity that until recently seemed our birthright. And we must address urgently the doubts that have been expressed about the capability of our institutions and processes to achieve these goals.

Proposals will be put before you, therefore, that address these three major concerns of the Canadian people and of my government—unity, prosperity and government responsiveness. I am confident that the importance of these issues will persuade all Parliamentarians to put Canada first, set partisan motives and calculations aside and work together for a stronger country.

Canadian Unity

We have been confided the stewardship of this great nation, constructed across an entire continent by generations of men and women determined to make a home for themselves and a future for

their children. They were inspired in their sacrifice by the conviction that tolerance and fairness, courage and compassion, and individual enterprise and neighbourly cooperation could overcome all obstacles and erase all doubts.

Now it is the turn of our generation to overcome obstacles, erase doubts and strengthen Canada to meet the challenges of the 21st century. In doing so, we must safeguard the rights of all Canadians and maintain those standards of citizenship that distinguish the Canadian way of life.

Some reforms can be achieved through legislation or policy; others require changes to our attitudes; and still others require changes to our constitution.

A constitution should unite a nation. Canadians across this country should be able to see themselves and their hopes and aspirations mirrored in their constitution. It is the one document that all Canadians should refer to with pride. That is not presently the case in Canada. And no task is more important than making the constitution a more faithful reflection of who we are, what we represent as a country and what we aspire to be as a people.

The Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future was constituted to give Canadians an opportunity to express their hopes and views on the kind of country Canada should be, so we can continue to prosper as we cross the threshold together into a new century. The Special Joint Committee on the Process for Amending the Constitution was established to allow Canadians to be involved in finding a better way of making constitutional changes. Both have increased understanding among Canadians of how much we have in common—as well as awareness of what we stand to lose. Canadians are moving beyond focusing on problems to suggesting solutions.

My government looks forward to receiving the recommendations of the two committees by Canada Day, July 1st. The committee reports, together with the work of similar commissions in several provinces and the soundings you have all taken of the views of your own constituents, will give you the understanding you need of what Canadians want done.

My government will formulate new proposals to focus public discussion on the goal of a more united and prosperous Canada. The proposals will suggest changes in federal and provincial powers and responsibilities and in national institutions. My government will be guided by a number of basic principles:

- that Canada has already proven its worth; we seek change in order to improve Canada, not to discard what we have accomplished together;

- that the Government of Canada represents all Canadianst; and that change can be achieved only through reasonable compromise and enlightened accommodation of the interests of all Canadians;

- that Quebec's unique character must be affirmed and that the particular interests of the West, the Atlantic provinces, Ontario, the North and aboriginal Canadians must be recognized, as well; and