

*Government Orders*

What reforms should we all make so that parliamentary institutions, including the Senate, work better and reflect the interests of all Canadians, rural and urban, west and east, and north?

In a country that prides itself on its human rights record, should legislatures have the power to override the Charter of Rights and overrule the fundamental rights of Canadians? Has our pride and our multiculturalism focused too much attention on our differences and begun to be a problem for a common Canadian identity?

Can Canada's aboriginal peoples preserve their heritage and at the same time share fully in the opportunities and responsibilities of contemporary life? In Canada's modern economy, what is best done by governments, and what by individual Canadians themselves?

[Translation]

In a country that depends on trade for over 30 per cent of its income, one of the highest such percentages in the world, why are so many industries so lax in upgrading their productivity to meet the competition?

Why have barriers to trade between Canadian provinces stood for generation after generation while the free trade agreement with the United States of America was concluded in 27 months?

These are critical questions that affect the lives and prospects of all Canadians. We have to answer them frankly if we are going to establish a consensus of common interest and common purpose in this country. There is no doubt in my mind that a renewed consensus can be built.

Putting our current problems into historical perspective helps. As disquieting as the current period is for our country, Canada has overcome difficult challenges in the past. The Constitutional Act of 1791 led to a long period of political unrest, including the rebellions of 1837. The forced union of Upper and Lower Canada in 1840 led to conflict and the arson of the Parliament building in 1849.

• (1520)

[English]

The British North America Act itself was preceded by a bitter and almost decade-long debate. Confederation, when it finally did come, was at the same time an act of separation of Upper and Lower Canada and an act of unification. And the system of government agreed upon, federalism, was itself a sharing of sovereignty.

We tend to forget that in the first Parliament in 1867 there were 18 separatist members, all of them from Nova Scotia. Twenty years later, according to Laurier: "The province of Manitoba is in open revolt. The province of Nova Scotia demands its separation from Confederation—from east to west and from north to south—prevailing feeling is one of unrest and uneasiness, of discontent and irritation".

Three years later in 1890, exactly a hundred years ago, Laurier had occasion to warn all Canadians: "We have come to a period in the history of this young country when premature disillusion now seems to be at hand".

The weakening of the imperial links with Britain at the turn of the century, the sending of Canadian servicemen into two world wars and into Korea, the flag debate in 1965, the Quebec referendum in 1980, the patriation of the Constitution in 1982 without Quebec's endorsement, all stimulated profound division and bitter debate in the country.

In fact no issue has been more divisive or debated, more bitter, than creating a made-in-Canada formula to amend Canada's Constitution. The process started in 1926 with the Balfour report and the relationship of the British Dominions to the Crown and to the United Kingdom. The required unanimous consent of the federal and provincial governments eluded successive patriation attempts and our Constitution remained an act of the British Parliament and could be amended only in the United Kingdom.

Important amendments to the Canadian Constitution were in fact secured through this route, including the transfer of jurisdiction over unemployment insurance to the federal government in 1940.