

Canadian dialogue

Throughout Canadian history, economic and linguistic disparities have placed strains on the federal system. Recently the ethnic division between a *francophone*-oriented Quebec government and the rest of Canada has demanded the particular attention of federal leaders.

In the search for a creative compromise, politicians are being forced to enunciate and examine Canada's fundamental issues. The eventual redefinition of federal arrangements will rest somewhere between national and provincial aspirations.

It is likely that reconciliation can be built only through a recognition of two facts:

- There are in Canada two linguistic groups and several cultures and they are often in conflict.
- Canada is a country of heterogeneous socio-economic regions.

The first fact demands constitutional and institutional guarantees and the second a proper division of the public purse and power. Both problems must be resolved in a way that allows flexibility and change. The changing socio-economic forces of the past century have made a redefinition of Confederation necessary. So, undoubtedly,

will those of the next 100 years. To begin, then, a formula for amending the constitution should be agreed on.

This dialogue will not end even with an agreement on these issues. The federal system will still require constant attention and delicate management. While provincial distinctiveness is the fundamental reason for all federal systems, some sense of positive consensus among the different regional groups is also imperative. The next century will be as difficult to navigate as the past, but it will not be impossible. In Canada, as in the United States, the original constitution provided a framework within which future generations could build a government. In both countries, the issue of the precise division of powers between central and state or provincial governments was left to be worked out through court decisions and political agreements in the pressures of a changing society. In both countries the process is still evolving.