

In a room not far from where I have my own office in the East Block on Parliament Hill, the members of that Government, under the first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, assembled 99 years ago this summer to begin their tasks of consolidating and extending the interests and jurisdiction of a new nation. It was on Parliament Hill that the people of Ottawa, taking their part in the simultaneous festivities of four provinces, assembled on July 1, 1867, to celebrate Confederation.

From this city, successive Canadian Governments have managed the affairs of a nation whose original four provinces have grown to ten. The inscription on our coat of arms "A mari usque ad mare" expresses the perspective from which they have had to view the work done in this capital and, beyond it, the activity of Canada in the world.

It is appropriate, therefore, to say something of Canada from a national and an international perspective.

We have valued unity in broad decisions about the national destiny, based on an acceptance of considerable diversity in the national life. The four provinces of the Atlantic seaboard and of Eastern Canada which came together in 1867 represented two languages and cultures and a great diversity of economic interests and attitudes towards the new political association.

The responsibilities of a fairly small population for a vast territory, with the problems of economic development and communications which this entailed, were already onerous. As the new nation took over from Britain the responsibility for governing great new areas of the West and of the North, these tasks became immense.

But the work was done and a transcontinental nation was created. The lines of communication were established; immigrants came in from many countries with the varied talents and traditions which they were to add to the Canadian mosaic; the riches of the earth were cultivated.

This was done without changing to any considerable extent the nature of the peoples who contributed to the development. Uniformity was not an ideal. Important questions about relations between the two founding groups in the population were not all settled. Questions even of a constitutional nature between Canada and Britain, or concerning our direct entry on the international scene, were left for decision as the new country progressively took over all the attributes of its sovereignty.

There were, of course, unifying forces of considerable importance. The federal system adopted in 1867 provided for significant provincial responsibility but also laid the basis for a strong central government. In the decades which had elapsed before Confederation, during which the gradual steps towards responsible government and independence were taken, there had been some crises and difficulties but there had also been accommodation, experiment and reform. This trend continued after Confederation.