

The power of dissolution enables the Governor General, on the recommendation of the Prime Minister, to cut short the mandate of the House of Commons at any time during the five years following a general election. By virtue of this power, elections to the House of Commons could be timed by the government to coincide with the triennial Senate elections. To prevent this, there should be constitutional safeguards.

### **Legal provisions governing Senate elections**

Legal provisions will be needed governing such matters as who is eligible to vote or to stand as a candidate for election. These provisions should be set out in a new statute designed specifically to govern all aspects of Senate elections, including election expenses. The statute should come into force in advance of the first elections.

### **The distribution of seats between the provinces and territories**

At present, Senate seats are divided according to the principle of four equal geographic regions — Ontario, Quebec, the Western provinces and the Atlantic provinces. The principle of equality is not followed strictly, because the four Atlantic provinces have a total of 30 seats in the Senate, compared with 24 for each of the other regions. Witnesses argued that this division on the basis of four regions is outmoded for the purposes of regional representation, that it should be abolished, and that the distribution of Senate seats should be made solely by allocating seats to each province and territory.

It was also asserted that it makes no sense for a province to have more seats than one with a much larger population, as happens now.

A number of witnesses argued strongly that each province should have equal representation in the Senate. They claimed, in essence, that equality of citizens in the House of Commons must be balanced by provincial equality in the Senate. This is the principle accepted in federations such as the United States, Australia and Switzerland, where all states or cantons have the same number of seats in the second chamber despite considerable population differences. These arguments were pressed most vigorously during our public hearings in the West and in the Atlantic provinces.

We note, however, that in none of these three federations is the imbalance between the constituent units as pronounced as it is in Canada. For example, Canada's largest province, Ontario, has about 36 per cent of the country's population; in the United States, the largest state has only about 10 per cent. In Canada, the application of the equality principle would enable the five least populous provinces — that is, those accounting for 13.4 per cent of the Canadian population — to have a majority in the Senate if they had the support of the territorial representatives, whatever their number. A resident of Prince Edward Island would have as much electoral clout as 70 Ontarians and 50 Quebeckers. Such pronounced inequities could jeopardize the institution's credibility. Moreover, if this system were adopted, the only province with a francophone majority would see its relative weight in the Senate, which stood at 33 per cent of the seats in 1867 and today stands at 23 per cent, plummet to less than 10 per cent.