

After all, where else but in Canada could you find a jurisdiction like the Northwest Territories which elects a couple of dozen representatives from across thousands of miles of barren tundra, who then come together to choose their own government leader and Cabinet -- all without benefit of party discipline?

Where else but Canada would you find a province such as Prince Edward Island that is smaller than several federal ridings in Metropolitan Toronto and yet returns four members to the House of Commons?

Where else, except perhaps the Soviet Union, would you find two official languages, English and French, in addition to 10 major aboriginal linguistic groups comprising an additional 58 languages?

There are thousands of these arrangements from Newfoundland to British Columbia to the high Arctic!

But experiments with democracy and constitution-making in Canada are not new.

The history of Canada's constitutional development goes all the way back to 1663 when France established New France as a royal province under the "Edict creating the Sovereign Council of Quebec."

In 1763, when Canada was transferred to British rule, the Royal Proclamation of 1763 established a number of principles including those respecting civil government in Quebec and others related to relations with Canada's aboriginal peoples.

With the American Revolution around the corner, the British government attempted to maintain the loyalty of its new Canadian subjects by passing the Quebec Act of 1774 which authorized the use of French civil law, permitted the free exercise of Roman Catholicism, and affirmed the legal recognition of Quebec as a distinct society in North America.

A number of other constitutional milestones occurred before the eventual signing of the British North America Act of 1867 which established a new form of federalism based on responsible parliamentary government, and was the basis for the country we call Canada.

But Canadians wouldn't let a simple thing like nationhood stop their quest for the "perfect constitution."

And, besides, there was one embarrassing technical problem -- and that was the fact that the Constitution of Canada was a British Statute -- a matter that was not resolved for 115 years until the Constitution Act of 1982 brought Canada's Constitution home.