

a decade ago, where the articulation of programs of multiculturalism was hailed as tremendous answer to many of our problems. Yet, now members of those very communities are suggesting to Parliament that there is probably a better way to do it and this must be examined. It is no longer a shibboleth or a slogan that there are real problems that emerge from policies devised in Ottawa that do not always meet the needs of large multicultural communities.

Clearly this government and governments before us and many members of Parliament have been talking too much and not listening enough. We must correct this fundamental deficiency and this government, and I know all members of Parliament will do precisely that.

Some hon. members: hear, hear.

Mr. Mulroney: The forum will facilitate a dialogue between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians to discuss how the aspirations of Canada's first peoples can be met within the Canadian Constitution. Canadians are also being invited to consider what is best done by governments and what is best done by individual Canadians themselves. The citizens' forum will very probably stimulate discussion on the questions that underlie all of these issues: how to ensure that this country's institutions, particularly Parliament, designed in the 19th century, will be more responsive to the needs of Canadians in the 21st, at the same time whether the division of responsibilities among the federal and provincial governments needs to be changed.

Some answers will begin to emerge as genuine dialogue is initiated across Canada, as reports come in from the parliamentary committees established in New Brunswick, Alberta and Quebec, and of course by hearings initiated by private groups as well as by this committee that will be set up by the House of Commons today.

In light of recent experience, we must also consider how we can go about developing the kind of Constitution Canadians want. Some argue that the best way to achieve meaningful reform is to start from scratch by dismantling our entire system of federalism as we know it today. As I said in Montreal 10 days ago, it seems to me rather obvious that nothing at all can be gained from the attempt to destroy a political system that is reasonably

efficient and respectful of identities, and that has, over 123 years, produced some rather remarkable results.

Rather, I think we have everything to gain by working together, members of all parties, business and labour, provinces and municipalities, recognizing that we have before us an enormous challenge to our national well-being. We have everything to gain by working together to improve and modernize our present arrangements.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, many Quebecers, in particular, find it difficult to understand how the Constitution, patriated 10 years ago,—the document that should have embodied their desire to flourish within Canada—instead enshrines their exclusion from the constitutional fold.

Because of the unfortunate events that led to the death of Meech, some would have us believe the only way to escape the status quo is to go back to square one and start again from scratch.

For my part, I say the country does not have to be dismantled in order to be later rebuilt. Let's not lose sight of the substance by chasing shadows.

There is another way, a better way, Mr. Speaker, to accommodate the need for fundamental change: it involves building on our strengths and improving our present system to adapt it to today's economic, political and cultural realities.

[*English*]

As I said in this House on November 1, "I believe that if it takes major changes to hold this country together, Canadians want those changes made. I believe if it takes a new process to achieve those changes, Canadians want a new process designed" and that is precisely what we are in the process ourselves of beginning to do today.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Mulroney: As the discussion paper explains, modifying the current procedure through consensus and agreed practices is not the only solution possible. Nothing in the mandate of the proposed special joint committee precludes an examination of alternatives to the current formulae, nor, indeed, alternative ways of bringing about changes to them.