

The debate which took place this summer focussed on the list of subjects presented by the federal government on June 9, which comprises a "package for the people" and a "package on government powers and institutions". The former involves issues such as whether a charter of rights (including language rights) should be entrenched in the constitution or left under existing arrangements of common law, civil codes or statutes. It also invites Canadians to rededicate themselves to the principle of sharing and to the reduction of regional disparities, and it addresses the question of where the constitution should ultimately repose and how it can be amended.

The second "package" addresses a number of economic questions including resource ownership and interprovincial trade, offshore resources, powers affecting the economy, communications (including broadcasting), family law, a new Upper House of Parliament involving the provinces, and a reformed Supreme Court. Since June the federal government has further elaborated its proposals on economic powers and on the movement of people, goods and capital across provincial borders.

There has also been some debate about procedural matters such as the order of discussions, deadlines, and possible unilateral action in the event of talks breaking down. One problem the leaders will have to face is how to interpret, or who may interpret, the will of Canadians. There is no constituent assembly for the purpose, and federal and provincial governments operate on such different planes that they cannot turn to the people at the same time for the resolution of these issues, short of a national referendum. Yet referenda have not been part of Canadian political tradition and would certainly be a last resort.

Canada Newsletter will carry further news on the constitutional debate in its next edition.

CANADA: THE ENERGY BALANCE

Canada is both an exporter and importer of energy. In recent years 46% of energy consumed has come from oil, 24% from hydro-electricity, 19% from natural gas, 9% from coal and 2% from nuclear sources. At present Canada is a net exporter of natural gas, coal and hydro-electricity, as well as of energy overall. However with regard to oil, the country is experiencing a growing deficit, due in part to declining reserves of "conventional" oil in the western provinces.

It is also significant that domestic energy resources are very unevenly distributed between the provinces and the regions. In this respect Canada is a microcosm of the world and faces similar questions about the manner in which benefits and burdens are shared in achieving satisfactory energy balances over time.

This situation has led the Canadian Government to make some far-reaching decisions. First, to assure the security of future oil supplies, the exploitation of the Athabasca tar sands (Alberta) and further exploration and development in Arctic and Atlantic offshore regions is advancing rapidly. The Athabasca tar sands contain enormous quantities of oil of which only about one-third is exploitable with existing technology. Full utilization of this resource will require both enhanced recovery techniques and