



Social Democratic Forum on Canada's Future

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August 27-29, 1999

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1 History and Mandate of the Forum

The Social Democratic Forum on Canada's Future was launched by a 1997 resolution of the New Democratic Party of Canada, which acknowledged a need to develop a clear vision of the future of the country that would resonate with all Canadians. New Democrats recognized that this vision could only be achieved through dialogue between a range of groups and individuals within the broader progressive community, including Aboriginal Peoples and social democrats in Québec. This was done in the belief that a majority of Canadians are social democrats by nature, and that finding a unified and uniting vision of social democracy will allow Canada to move forward into the new millennium.

In early 1998, the Party assembled a panel of nine distinguished Canadians to conduct the Social Democratic Forum on Canada's Future. The Forum's mandate was to enter into a dialogue with Canadians in all regions to create a vision for the future of the federation, one that is firmly rooted in progressive principles.

At the panel's first meeting in March 1998, it decided to undertake a process of quiet reflection and outreach to the social democratic communities, to determine priorities and begin the process of building a common vision of the future of Canada. The panel members approved a 10-page discussion paper and a series of questions. The questions covered a broad range of issues, from the big picture -- "How do you define Canada?" -- to specific questions, like "How do we get the mix of cooperative federalism and country-wide standards right -- to ensure the equality of Canadians?"

The Forum's consultation was multifaceted and flexible. The discussion paper and questions were distributed to a wide range of groups and individuals within the NDP and the broader progressive community, including over 80 national, Québécois and provincial social movement groups, several national Aboriginal organizations, the Canadian Labour Congress, and all provincial/territorial federations of labour. Dozens of meetings, workshops, discussions, and events took place in every province as well as the Yukon. The Forum received written submissions from many individuals and from several riding associations which held their own workshops.

The outcome of this dialogue was a preliminary report presented to Federal Council on January 30, 1999. The report was sent to the groups and individuals that received the initial discussion package, as well as those that submitted written comments. Feedback was solicited from visitors to the NDP's World Wide Web site. The panel met in April to consider the response and to draft its final report and recommendations. This report will be discussed at the National Convention of the New Democratic Party, August 27-29, 1999, where delegates will debate and vote on the Forum's recommendations.

The Social Democratic Forum on Canada's Future brought together progressive Canadians from all parts of the country: New Democrats, trade unionists, social activists, Aboriginal Peoples, and Canadians from many different social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Their voices reflected the diverse and dynamic reality that distinguishes Canada from all other countries. Yet they all shared one fundamental goal: to build a caring, compassionate society which recognizes and embraces its diversity and realizes the social, economic, cultural and democratic rights of all its inhabitants. What made the Forum so remarkable was the dedication of all who participated to finding constructive, progressive ways of making our federation work better for all Canadians.

The panel wishes to thank all of the individuals and organizations that have helped produce this document and helped make the Social Democratic Forum on Canada's Future a success. They demonstrated that, through dialogue and cooperation, progressive Canadians can find proactive solutions to our collective challenges. Let us now begin the process of building a stronger, more responsive federation.

2 The Big Picture: Defining Canada

Social Democrats approached our broad questions about the nature of Canada and Canadian identities by focusing first on our shared values. Participants were quick to recognize the diversity of our country and the difficulty of fixing one single definition of Canadian identity. Canada is partially defined by its resistance to definition and homogeneity, and by its rich, dynamic complexity.

There was consensus among Forum participants that we must recognize Quebecers as a people. At the same time, many participants believed that the Party's traditional "two nations" approach to Canada is not wholly reflective of historical or contemporary realities. Participants said that although the importance of the two "founding peoples" is undeniable, we cannot ignore the role of Aboriginal Peoples in our country's history. We must therefore find a way to assure Aboriginal Peoples a greater role in shaping our country's future. "Two nations" too easily leaves out Aboriginal Peoples, or reduces them to an afterthought -- to "Two nations ...plus". Participants also pointed out the diversity within so-called "English Canada", and the impact of immigration from all parts of the world on Canadian society. We must embrace the multiplicity of languages, traditions and cultures that has enriched our country, and the important role of new Canadians on our social, economic and cultural landscape. There is no monolithic "English Canada".

Participants also observed that Canada's diversity goes beyond the multiplicity of ethnocultural origins of its citizens. Each region of this vast country has its own geographic, social and historical character; each province and territory has its own political and social culture. Yet, we do converge around some shared values: tolerance, compassion, and a sense of collective responsibility that is reflected in social programs and national institutions like Medicare. And as

Barbara Jack pointed out, “if anything binds Canadians together, regardless of language or origin, it’s our shared experience of living in this huge northern land. It is not only Quebecers who can relate to Gilles Vignault’s song ‘Mon pays, c’est l’hiver.’”

Social democrats outside of Québec observed that many Quebecers, both sovereigntists and federalists, have a different sense of national identity. Some consider themselves Quebecers and Canadians, some see themselves as Quebecers first and Canadians second, and some only consider themselves Quebecers. Some participants remarked that this strong sense of the collective in Québec society has helped build an equally strong commitment to social democracy -- and this commitment has helped strengthen the social democratic consensus in all regions of the country. As well, participants’ questioning of “two nations” does not detract from their expression of a deep commitment to Canada’s bilingualism, which was frequently cited as a source of pride. Many participants pointed out the diverse network of French-speaking communities which exists in all parts of our country, and expressed a commitment to ensuring that these minorities are adequately recognized and supported.

Participants were also quick to emphasize their concerns about the erosion of the common values that help unite Canadians as a result of the neo-liberal ideology that has been so predominant in recent years. The emphasis on reducing the role and scope of government, the obsession with trade “liberalization”, and the idolization of the market have done considerable damage to Canadians’ sense of collective responsibility. Social democrats encouraged the NDP to continue to question this agenda, to put forward an alternative approach, and to assert the role of government in protecting the public good and building a just society.

It is clear that the “two nations” approach was developed at a time when both English and French Canada were equally blind to the importance of Aboriginal Peoples as the first inhabitants of this land. Any attempt to set out a new vision of Canada must address this historic injustice. As well, the “two nations” concept does not acknowledge the important role immigration had, and continues to have, in shaping our country.

Canada is a country of indefinable diversities. There will never be a final description. It can be approached from many different angles: as three nations (Aboriginal Peoples, Québec and English Canada); as six regions; as ten provinces and three territories; and so on. All of these descriptions are accurate and appropriate.

But in one sense, Canada must be seen as dual, and this duality warrants further examination.

Canada is an immigrant society, made up of people who have come to these shores from all parts of the world, from all cultures and civilizations and linguistic origins. This is one of the major sources of the unprecedented range of ideas

and talents which have made our society rich and dynamic both culturally and economically.

But at the same time, Canada also is made up of Aboriginal societies with roots going back before the modern waves of immigration. Aboriginal Peoples have a unique place in this country and unique claims upon it.

Immigrant societies receive people from widely different origins, and tend to bring about a convergence around one common public language. In the United States, for example, this is English; in Argentina, it's Spanish. Only in Canada does one find not one, but two such languages of convergence: French and English. We have two immigrant societies in this country -- societies which have been enriched and strengthened by several waves of immigration from all corners of the globe. Canadians are insufficiently aware -- and astonished -- at the uniqueness of this achievement.

Aboriginal Peoples are part of this duality in that Aboriginal societies had to choose either English or French as the language by which they interact with public structures and institutions.

This uniquely Canadian duality doesn't mean that the two languages exercise the same pull of attraction equally throughout the whole country. On the contrary, they each have their areas of geographic strength. The centre, and major component, of the Canada's French-speaking immigrant society is clearly the province of Québec.

Québec has become the centre of a dynamic, varied, multicultural society which speaks French. In this important respect, Québec is not a province like the others. It is the heart of Canada's French-speaking population -- a diverse population composed of Aboriginal Peoples and people from all parts of the world -- and as such has responsibilities and challenges unlike those of any other province.

This didn't just happen. The fact that Québec is the vibrant, distinct society it is today is primarily the result of its policies since the Quiet Revolution. These were policies frequently based on the values of social democracy. This has become part of the strength of social democracy in Canada as a whole. As social democrats, we rejoice at this, and give our full support. Our challenge is to find the way to reflect, in a meaningful way, the fact that Québec is not a province like the others.

We embrace the fact that Canada lends itself to so many different definitions. This diversity is our greatest strength. In many ways, what unites us as a country is not a shared sense of cultural identity, but shared values and common goals, as manifested in our social programs.

3 Constitutional fatigue and how to overcome it

Participants in Forum discussions recognized that there must be some changes to the way the federation functions, or we risk losing the social programs Canadians have struggled for and thought they had won. But is a constitutional approach the best approach at this time? Participants observed that Canadians everywhere are weary of constitutional battles -- this was clearly expressed in all of our meetings. As well, many participants expressed a frustration at constitutional tinkering at a time when poverty in Canada has reached crisis levels, when many are un- and under-employed, and when our once-heralded social programs are under attack. They recognized that the hostility toward constitutional discussions, in many ways, has its origins in Canadians' profound animosity toward recent governments' economic policies.

As Robert Chisholm pointed out,

We'd better have something different to offer the debate... so far it has been too narrow and 'lawyerish'. We need to address the realities affecting the lives of Canadians. We need to engage Canadians at that level.

A participant in our Newfoundland meeting emphasized that it doesn't make sense to have civil and political rights if you don't have anything to eat. Poverty marginalizes people and undermines a democratic and just society. We must ensure that peoples' basic needs are being met.

Constitutional fatigue can be overcome by truly constructive solutions to the challenges facing our country. At the moment, however, these solutions are not readily apparent. This has prevented Canada from dealing adequately with fundamental questions of social and economic policy. We believe that a constructive, balanced solution is not only possible, but absolutely necessary. In the following section of this report, we will offer our proposal for a model of federalism that meets the needs of our dynamic and diverse federation.

4 Finding a balance: Responsive Federalism

We asked participants to tell us what a social democratic approach to federalism should look like. The response was a strong consensus in favour of an asymmetrical approach, based upon a cooperative model for decision making. What was abundantly clear was that social democrats understand the complexity of our federation and the impossibility of finding a magic solution to the so-called "unity debate".

Perhaps it is even time to stop thinking about the issue as a debate -- that is, as a battle between two opposing, absolute positions. Absolutists want to know which side our Party is on in the battle between centralization and decentralization. We need to resist this dynamic and offer instead a reasoned and balanced alternative, one that we can offer to Canadians in all regions in a spirit of constructive dialogue.

Many progressive Canadians -- particularly those living outside Québec -- believe that too much devolution of powers to the provinces will further erode our social safety net. They fear an end to universality, reduced services, privatization and other regressive changes. This fear was widely articulated in our meetings and workshops, but was especially prevalent in provinces where right-wing governments have done significant damage to social programs (Alberta, Ontario) and areas that rely heavily on federal funding, equalization payments, and other forms of support that require a more centralized approach (Atlantic Canada, Yukon).

Quebecers had less of a fear of this, having more confidence in their government and, perhaps, a greater sense of collective responsibility. Most social democrats outside Québec understand why decentralization is appealing to Quebecers, and is less of a threat to social programs there -- although some did express concern about recent cutbacks in that province, the latent Toryism of Premier Bouchard, and other potential future threats to the social democratic consensus in that province. In general, many are concerned that decentralization or further devolution of power will put us on the fast track towards privatization, inequities in services and programs offered in different parts of Canada, and erosion of the sense of collective responsibility that many feel distinguishes our country. Without federal checks and balances, without some pan-Canadian standards, can we really trust the provinces to do what is right?

But social democrats also asked whether we can really trust the federal government to do what is right. After all, we are currently living with a right-wing federal government that slashed federal transfer payments, dumped the responsibility for managing the crisis in health care and other programs on to the provinces and territories, and cut the federal spending power to deplorable levels. It also balanced the budget by slashing benefits to the unemployed and pilfering the Employment Insurance surplus. This is also a government that participated in the secret negotiations for the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, an agreement that would have seriously compromised Canadian sovereignty, not to mention our social programs and our environment. It is fruitless to have a strong central government if that government does not act in the public interest. Accordingly, social democrats believe that the federal government also needs checks and balances.

So what does this leave us with? In many ways, the political climate surrounding these issues -- the national unity debate -- has reduced our options to two absolutes: federal unilateralism or complete devolution of powers to the

provinces. Choose one or the other, we're told. You're with us, or against us. Refusal to take a side means you're dismissed as wishy-washy, doomed to irrelevance.

Recent events -- in particular, the 1998 Supreme Court ruling on Québec secession -- have illustrated that the complexity of the situation requires a balanced approach. That ruling, which echoed long-standing NDP policy, adds weight to our conviction that New Democrats must continue to resist an extremist approach to federalism. We must begin to think outside of the destructive oppositions that have dominated the debate for so long. It is time for Canadians to stop thinking in absolute terms, but instead embrace the nuances and dynamism of our federation. We must find a model that complements this.

Unilateralism is no model for governance, especially in a country as diverse as Canada. Each province, each territory, each region has special characteristics, needs, and challenges. Every level of government has a stake in ensuring that each region of the country is able to thrive economically, socially and culturally, and that all citizens are able to share the benefits of Canada's success and participate in the democratic process.

Absolute decentralization is not an acceptable alternative, either. One group at our BC workshop observed that decentralization is being touted as a potential cure for regional alienation. But that doesn't solve the local issues, it doesn't help our eroding social safety net, and it provides less stability for citizens by diminishing our sense of national identity. As many Forum participants pointed out, decentralization to ten "equal" provinces will not address the concerns of the people of Québec. Most Forum participants questioned the notion of "equality of the provinces" -- or, at least, felt that the phrase lends itself too easily to multiple and conflicting definitions and should be articulated differently. Many pointed out that if all provinces were equal, there would be no need for equalization payments. Others emphasized that "equal" should not be taken to mean "exactly the same". Canada is not a homogeneous country, nor do we want it to be.

Forum participants clearly rejected both absolute positions. They urged the New Democratic Party to take a leadership role in advocating a model of the federation in which provincial and territorial governments work cooperatively with the federal government to ensure the social, economic and cultural welfare of all Canadians.

As Bill Blaikie has pointed out in his paper, "New Democrats and National Unity", the Party has

consistently supported, in one form or another, the essential duality of Canada's non-aboriginal political culture and the recognition of Québec as a distinct society. It has also held that a federal system flexible and cooperative enough to accommodate the diversity of Canada's regional realities was not inconsistent with a federal government capable of delivering a wide array of national social

programs with national standards that would define a Canadian citizenship.

In fact, our advocacy of cooperative federalism dates back to the Party's founding convention in 1961, when it passed the following policy:

.... The New Democratic Party affirms its belief in a federal system which alone insures the united development of the two nations which originally associated to form the Canadian partnership, as well as that of other ethnic groups which later made Canada their home. Canada's constitution particularly guarantees the national identity of French Canadians and the development of their culture. The New Democratic Party will fully maintain and respect these guarantees. Canadian federalism must provide for the protection of cultural, religious and other democratic rights, permit the vigorous and balanced growth of the country as a whole, and assure provincial autonomy.

The New Democratic Party believes that social and economic planning must take place at all levels of government. It therefore looks to close collaboration amongst responsible governments to coordinate plans and administration and to set Canadian minimum standards...

Our founding convention called for a cooperative model of federalism, with specific provisions to enable Québec to maintain its linguistic and cultural integrity. Thirty-seven years later, participants in the Social Democratic Forum on Canada's Future revealed that New Democrats still subscribe to these fundamental principles.

Participants also emphasized that we must articulate a vision of the federation that is appropriate for Canada in the new millenium while building upon our founding principles. Many participants at our meetings challenged the Party to take a stronger position in support of asymmetrical federalism. As Bob White put it, we "should put more meat on the bones of the policies that already exist". We also heard a lot about finding ways for various levels of government to work together to set clear standards for social programs.

The labour movement provided us with perhaps the clearest articulation of the possibilities for an asymmetrical model. Both the Fédération des travailleuses et des travailleurs du Québec and the Canadian Labour Congress suggested that we might look to their relationship as an example of the kind of partnership that could be established between Québec and the rest of Canada. This relationship is based on the principle that what the CLC negotiates with Québec, it doesn't negotiate with other provincial federations of labour. The CLC-FTQ agreement sets out clear roles and responsibilities as well as fiscal arrangements which allow the FTQ to finance the additional functions. The relationship is, according to the CLC, based on mutual respect and the reality that "we are in two different worlds". This relationship, however, is also based upon shared values and

common goals. Can this really be extended to apply to a country as diverse as ours, where the political players have not shared the same commitment to social justice and equity?

We believe that asymmetry, accompanied by a strong commitment to cooperative decision making, is the best approach to the Canadian federation. It allows the recognition of the Aboriginal and Québec Peoples in a meaningful way. It also accommodates the diversity of provinces and regions, each with different circumstances and needs requiring different approaches and solutions.

Canada has already recognized such asymmetry as a reality and a necessity. Equalization payments, for example, extend special support to the territories, in recognition of the unique circumstances facing northern communities. Québec has its own civil code, its own pension plan, control over immigration, and other mechanisms that allow it to protect and promote its French culture. What we need now is a framework that would facilitate intergovernmental relations, set out clear roles and responsibilities, enhance cooperation, and guarantee stable funding so that all governments can do what they need to build a healthy, caring, just society.

Our federation's policies and structures must be responsive to the different situations of the diverse societies that make up Canada. Different provinces, different communities will fit in differently to the whole because the needs and predicaments of their citizens are different. That Québec shares the field of immigration with the federal government, for example, is not an arbitrary anomaly. It is a response to the reality that Québec is the centre of one of Canada's two immigrant societies. Similarly, any model of federalism must be able to respond to the needs of Aboriginal Peoples.

But federalism is more than finding ways for governments to work together. The Canadian federation must be responsive to the needs of its citizens, embrace and encourage our country's geographic, linguistic and cultural diversity, and reflect our shared values of cooperation, mutual responsibility, equity and justice. A strong federation is built upon a healthy participatory democracy that engages its citizens in continuous and constructive debate. We need a vision of federalism that acknowledges and encompasses these different, yet connected, facets.

Recommendation #1: Our goal is to build a Canada that recognizes and responds to the needs of its citizens -- and acknowledges the many ways in which our country is diverse. Canadians need guarantees that their basic social, economic, environmental, cultural and democratic rights will be protected and promoted by all levels of government.

Accordingly, the NDP advocates a new framework for Canada: Responsive Federalism, based on the principles of co-decision and the recognition of the Canadian diversity. Responsive Federalism is a framework which recognizes and responds to the geographic, cultural and linguistic diversity of the Canadian federation, including the unique situations of the

Aboriginal and Québec Peoples, and by which governments work cooperatively to promote the social, cultural and economic well-being of all Canadians. Responsive Federalism includes the following elements:

- **Affirming our Social and Economic Rights: A Social Union Based on the Principle of Co-decision**
- **Protecting our Charter of Rights and Freedoms for all Canadians**
- **Securing Justice for Aboriginal Peoples and First Nations**
- **Recognizing and Respecting the Québec People in a Meaningful Way**
- **Protecting French-Speaking Minorities**
- **Revitalizing Democracy**

The following section of this report will elaborate on each of these elements.

5 Elements of Responsive Federalism

Affirming our Social and Economic Rights: A Social Union Based on the Principle of Co-decision

What We Heard

Forum Participants called for a model of cooperative federalism based upon a clear expression of the social, cultural and economic rights of all Canadians. We were told that our governments' primary objective must be to build a healthy, compassionate society, one which ensures the well-being of all Canadians.

Many participants felt that Canadians need a formal articulation of their social and economic rights, to complement our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. For many, the Canadian identity is intertwined with our history of compassionate and mutually supportive social policies, such as Medicare. But, for the past two decades, these rights have been threatened by neo-liberal policies of austerity.

One of the most significant casualties of the Liberal government's overhaul of its spending for social programs through the creation of the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) was the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP). When CAP was replaced by the CHST in 1995, Canadians lost their mechanism for holding governments accountable to meet certain standards in social welfare. This loss was compounded by the fact that the amount of federal funding for social assistance and other programs was dramatically reduced.

In 1998, Canada received sharp criticism from a United Nations committee for its poor performance in adhering to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The UN committee cited a number of violations, referring in particular to Canada's record on poverty, the treatment of Aboriginal Peoples and women, the reform of UI and the elimination of CAP. Their report states that "by

according virtually unfettered discretion in relation to social rights to provincial Governments, the Government of Canada has created a situation in which Covenant standards can be undermined and effective accountability has been radically reduced”.

Faced with the continued and relentless attacks on our social safety net by successive federal governments and most provincial governments, Canadians are seeking ways to defend collective rights and advance a program of effective social policy. We must find a way to ensure that all levels of government live up to their legal obligations under international agreements to which Canada is a signatory, including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the UN Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. Governments must be accountable, and rights must be enforceable -- no matter which government has jurisdiction over a particular social program.

The concept of a social charter was raised repeatedly at Forum discussions as a possible avenue for governmental accountability. Although many participants liked the concept in theory, they were divided about whether a constitutional statement of Canadians’ social rights would be workable in practice.

Some participants supported a mechanism where citizens could seek formal redress when their social rights were violated. For instance, Shalom Schachter offered a model for political enforcement:

Specifically, there would be a ‘user friendly’ Social Rights Commission that would receive complaints about failures of governments to comply with the provisions of the social charter. The commission’s composition would have to [be] made up of persons with a proven record of research and advocacy on behalf of disadvantaged groups.

Others expressed concerns about establishing a mechanism where social rights of individual citizens would be justiciable. Allan Blakeney warns of the dangers of putting in place a

type of social charter which seeks to set out norms which would be enforceable by the courts [...] I believe that the setting and enforcing of norms should come through the political process rather than the judicial process.... Since I regard the legal system as essentially conservative, both economically and socially, and essentially based upon individual rights and norms, I do not see it as performing the function that is sometimes suggested by advocates of a legally binding social charter.

The Social Union Framework Agreement

While our Forum was considering this issue, the provinces, territories, and federal government were engaged in negotiations on what has become known as

the Social Union. The negotiations arose from a variety of developments in intergovernmental relations. For example, decades of reduced federal funding for social programs has reduced the federal government's share of health spending to 15% of the total costs of Medicare. This is down from the original 50%. By its own negligence, the Liberal government has threatened the legitimacy of the role of the federal government in determining standards for social programs, or for creating new Canada-wide programs like pharmacare or homecare. Federal governments have not lived up to their responsibility for maintaining stable funding for social programs. Clearly, we cannot rely solely on the federal spending power to set and enforce standards.

Even when the Chrétien government has undertaken new social spending, it has taken the form of an unrepentant unilateralism, as illustrated by the Millennium Scholarship Foundation announced in 1997. This has only added weight to the case for a thoroughgoing reform of the fiscal and administrative relationship between provincial, territorial and federal governments.

The provinces entered into negotiations with the federal government as a united force, having agreed on their proposals at a 1998 meeting in Saskatoon. That all provincial and territorial governments -- including Quebec -- had agreed to a common position was remarkable. They called for a clarification of roles and responsibilities, for a way for the various levels of government to work together to create new programs and maintain old ones, to set standards and to settle disputes. Andrew Petter, BC's Minister Responsible for Intergovernmental Relations, described their proposals as

the best hope in a long time for protecting national social programs, fostering federal-provincial collaboration and promoting national unity. Taken together, they envisage a new framework for cooperative federalism better suited to meeting the political demands and fiscal realities of Canada today.

But the process was not without its problems. Negotiations were conducted behind closed doors, and the lack of transparency raised concerns that this agreement would just be another example of Executive Federalism -- the future of the country being negotiated in secret by an elite group of white men. There was little by way of public discussion. Many progressive Canadians saw the potential for further erosion of the federal role in social programs, further decentralization, and less hope for preserving and expanding our social safety net.

After months of closed-door negotiations, the First Ministers agreed to a Social Union Framework on February 4, 1999. The agreement was accompanied by a promise from the Prime Minister of more funding for health care. As well, there was a reaffirmation of the principles of the Canada Health Act by all parties.

The agreement contained victories and compromises by both levels of government. But Québec did not sign. Premier Bouchard expressed his view

that the other provinces had given up too much in the pursuit of more federal funding for health care. The abandonment of the demand for opting-out with full compensation was one of the compromises Bouchard could not accept.

The agreement was met with profound indifference by the broader public. The few that paid attention had different approaches to the deal. Some saw it as a dangerous development, an abandonment of the federal role in setting social policy. Others saw it as a vindication of the federal spending power. It was praised by some as a positive step toward the acceptance of asymmetrical federalism, while others interpreted it as evidence of English Canada's inability to accept Québec's role in the federation. Many commentators agreed that the framework would not necessarily address the crisis in health care, poverty or other social issues.

The debate over whether the Social Union is a good or a bad thing only demonstrates the inadequacy of the deal. The language is vague, opening it up to multiple interpretations. The framework is largely administrative, but carries few mechanisms to bind governments to promote the well-being of all Canadians or to ensure we are meeting our international obligations.

Essentially, the Social Union Framework is an agreement between federal, provincial and territorial governments to cooperate on social policy. It sets out mechanisms for creating and funding social programs. In many ways, it reflects the spirit of the kind of cooperative federalism the New Democratic Party has been advocating for decades.

In many other ways, it does not address the serious erosion of our social safety net, including chronic underfunding and the lack of enforceable standards. Also, the lack of transparency in the Social Union negotiations does little to inspire confidence in governments' sincerity about promises to develop mechanisms for accountability and transparency. The Social Union Framework's biggest shortcoming is the lack of any reference to social rights.

While the Framework makes reference to the many ways in which Canada is diverse, there are few provisions that take into account the particular needs of Aboriginal peoples or Quebecers. The agreement does declare that nothing in the framework will take away from Aboriginal rights, and governments do commit themselves to work with Aboriginal Peoples "to find practical solutions to their pressing needs". There are no real guarantees, however, that these consultations will be meaningful or will result in concrete action.

The Social Union will not be complete until all the provinces are a part of it. The government of Québec has not signed the agreement. There is a temptation to see this as a form of asymmetrical federalism by default. At the moment, however, it only contains the potential for asymmetrical federalism. If followed up in the right way, perhaps it could lead to the negotiation of a different agreement which Québec would be able to sign.

Early in the process, premiers described the Social Union negotiations as an opportunity to create a new unity in the federation. This has not occurred. Is the deal salvageable in this respect? Can we build upon the work the first ministers began, and shape the Social Union into a truly cooperative process of decision-making that is driven by a commitment to the well-being of all Canadians?

Our vision of Responsive Federalism, initially released shortly before the provincial, territorial and federal governments met in Ottawa to agree on a final deal, includes our model of a Social Union based on the principle of co-decision. Our approach has some elements in common with the Social Union Framework. But there are also some fundamental differences. New Democrats must take every opportunity to work to improve the governments' Framework and make the Social Union truly responsive to citizens.

We agree with Ed Broadbent that "social rights should be part of Canadians' sense of themselves and their country. New Democrats should be leading this agenda".

Canada should also live up to its responsibilities as a global citizen by making sure that we can deliver on our commitments as a signatory to international human rights instruments, whether the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, or the various agreements on environmental protection. Our rights and responsibilities are clearly laid out in these agreements -- governments must develop structures and mechanisms that allow us to meet these obligations to the international community and, above all, to Canadian citizens. These principles must be the bedrock of Canada's Social Union.

The Liberal government's fiscal betrayal has exposed the dangers of relying solely on the federal spending power as the guarantor of Canada-wide social programs. We have already demonstrated that neither federal unilateralism nor complete decentralization will guarantee Canadians access to a wide array of quality social programs. New Democrats must advocate an approach that puts the well-being of Canadians first by encouraging governments to work together to maintain and create programs which meet Canada-wide standards.

The greatest achievements of Canadian society in the decades that followed the Second World War were the creation of our social programs, in particular Medicare. A new Social Union offers the possibility of breaking through the impasse that has prevented the development of new social programs since Medicare was introduced in 1967. New Democrats should make full use of the Social Union arrangements to build upon the achievements of Medicare and existing cost-shared programs and advance Canada-wide social policies that enable us to fully realize the social rights of all Canadians, especially in areas of urgent need such as income security, child care, and housing.

We believe the best opportunity for achieving this goal lies in the creation of a Social Union based on the principle of co-decision and the recognition of the

Canadian diversity. Co-decision is a process by which governments work cooperatively to develop priorities for social policy and to set Canada-wide standards for social programs.

It is important to define clearly what we mean by standards. At the moment, the only real standards we have for any social program are those relating to Medicare: the five principles of the Canada Health Act, as well as additional standards that are enforced punitively, namely the prohibition of extra billing and user fees. The principles of public administration, universality, comprehensiveness, portability and accessibility are an excellent model for the development of standards for other programs, because they set out clear governing principles for any program without dictating the specific design or delivery of that program in a particular province or territory.

Co-decision recognizes that governments have an equal stake in the social, economic and cultural well-being of Canadians, while ensuring equal access to a broad range of social programs. If the costs of running a particular program are to be shared, then it makes sense that the responsibility for developing and meeting standards be shared as well. The federal government has a distinct responsibility as a signatory to international agreements; a Social Union based on co-decision would provide a mechanism by which all levels of government work together to ensure that we are meeting our international obligations.

Co-decision balances the need for Canada-wide standards with the reality that programs must be delivered to Canadians in a manner that recognizes the different needs and circumstances facing Canadians in different parts of the country. In particular, co-decision must address the pressing needs of Aboriginal communities, and must involve Aboriginal governments and representatives.

Co-decided standards must be binding on all governments. A government may choose to opt out of a new cost-shared program, but the standards must still apply. That being said, however, a truly responsive Social Union must also recognize the unique role of Québec within the federation. In order to accomplish this, we believe that the principle of asymmetry should be combined with the process of co-decision. That is, Québec should be able to opt out, with full compensation, if it chooses not to participate in the co-decision process for a particular program.

A Social Union based on co-decision would foster a climate of mutual respect and cooperation and would enable governments to work together for the benefit of all Canadians. One of the benefits of a responsive Social Union based on co-decision would be that the federal government would no longer be able to use the federal spending power in areas of exclusive provincial/territorial jurisdiction in complete disregard of the priorities and needs of provinces and territories, as in the case of the Millennium Scholarship Foundation. The Social Union Framework's promise of "Reciprocal Notice and Consultation" is not adequate. A promise to give notice and to consult before proceeding with a policy change does not necessarily mean the other governments' advice will be heeded or their

concerns addressed. We believe that governments must be committed to making decisions together; that who does what is less important than what governments can do to ensure the well-being of Canadians.

Canadians must also be assured that their social programs are adequately funded, and that this funding will remain stable over time. Unilateral changes in funding arrangements are not acceptable. The Federal government does have a unique fiscal responsibility, not only in funding cost-shared programs but in ensuring that disadvantaged provinces and territories have the resources they need to deliver quality social programs. New Democrats must reaffirm their commitment to the principle of equalization as an important part of a responsive Social Union.

The process of co-decision must be transparent and inclusive. Canadians should be aware of and involved in the setting of priorities for social policy and in the development of standards. Citizens are central to the process that should keep the governments accountable to their obligations under the Social Union as well as our international obligations.

A more inclusive, cooperative mechanism for decision-making will ultimately result in a stronger federation. The development of a responsive Social Union based on co-decision would have lasting effects, not just in social policy, but in other areas, including environmental policy.

Recommendation #2: That the New Democratic Party advocates Social Union arrangements that would develop and maintain Canada-wide social policy by co-decision. A responsive Social Union would act as a covenant between governments and citizens. It would guarantee Canadians equal access to a wide range of quality social programs, recognize and respond to the diversity of our federation and its citizens, and ensure that we meet our obligations under international human rights agreements. Co-decision, a process by which governments work cooperatively to develop priorities for social policy and to set Canada-wide standards for social programs, would foster a sense of collective responsibility and cooperation.

A Social Union based on co-decision would operate according to the following principles:

Standards

- **Federal, provincial and territorial governments would co-decide Canada-wide standards for programs where costs are shared.**
- **A Social Union based on co-decision would respond to the unique circumstances of each province and territory, as well as Aboriginal communities, by ensuring that provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments have the responsibility for the specific design, implementation and administration of programs.**
- **The principle of asymmetry is an important part of a responsive Social Union. Québec, as the centre of Canada's French-speaking society,**

has responsibilities and challenges unlike those facing other provinces and territories. Should Québec choose not to participate in the process of co-decision for a particular program, it should be able to opt out of the program with full compensation.

- Co-decided Canada-wide standards to social programs would be binding on all other governments, even if individual governments were to opt out of a Canada-wide program with compensation.
- Any attempt to incorporate Medicare, the standards of which are now underwritten exclusively by the federal spending power, into Social Union arrangements would have to be done in such a way as to leave no opportunity for a province to opt out of the current provisions of the Canada Health Act.

Funding

- The fiscal arrangements of a co-decided program could not be changed unilaterally.
- The principle of equalization is important to ensuring that quality social programs are accessible no matter where you live in Canada. Equalization payments must be maintained.

Inclusivity and Transparency

- Aboriginal governments must be formally and extensively involved in the process of co-decision.
- Extensive consultation and dialogue are a necessary part of determining priorities for social policy, creating new programs, and determining standards. Co-decision must be an open, inclusive and transparent process, and new policies or programs should be developed in consultation with groups affected by those policies and programs. Open debate by all levels of government and in all legislatures, and the meaningful participation of civil society are necessary steps toward building a responsive Social Union.
- In cases where a co-decided program involved the administrative transfer of responsibility from the federal government to the provinces and territories, minority language groups would have to be extensively involved to ensure that their constitutional rights are guaranteed in the new arrangements.

Accountability

- An independent Accountability Panel would be created under the Social Union to assess whether governments are fulfilling their obligations under Social Union agreements and whether the social rights of Canadians are being respected. This body would be composed in such a way as to reflect the geographic, cultural and linguistic diversity of the federation. The Accountability Panel would report annually to the Social Rights Commission.
- An independent Social Rights Commission would be established to adjudicate disputes between governments concerning the integrity of Social Union agreements and claims brought by individual Canadians

concerning a government's fulfilment of its obligations to individual citizens under Social Union agreements.

Securing Justice for Aboriginal Peoples and First Nations

Canadians have only just begun to grapple with the many challenges facing Aboriginal Peoples and First Nations in Canada. There is an urgent need for action to raise awareness of the historical reality and legacy of Canada's colonial origins, the current social and economic conditions of Canada's Aboriginal population, the numerous outstanding treaties and land claim negotiations, and the vast numbers of Aboriginal Peoples living off reserve who may not benefit from federal programs and do not have access to governance structures. Notwithstanding these stark realities, the federal Liberal government has, to date, implemented only a few of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

New Democrats understand and share the immense frustration of Aboriginal groups about the lack of meaningful progress toward implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. In recent years, New Democratic governments have made great strides towards settling outstanding claims and finding new ways to work with Aboriginal governments. Recent land agreements, such as those reached with the Nisga'a and Sechelt peoples, are particularly significant, but there are many other achievements that should be acknowledged. Participants in our Yukon roundtable, for example, were proud of the partnerships that Aboriginal, municipal and territorial governments have developed. And the panel was reminded that the 1982 Constitutional package recognized Aboriginal rights only because the federal NDP Caucus succeeded in their fight to have Aboriginal rights included.

In our meeting with the Assembly of First Nations, National Chief Phil Fontaine emphasized that First Nations see themselves as "unique", as another government. Like the provinces, they want to exercise some jurisdictional control over programs and services. But the restoration of jurisdiction from the federal and provincial governments must still take place. First Nations don't want to see offloading. Instead, they want clear definitions of responsibilities. The AFN wants the federal government to come forward with a policy statement recognizing First Nations as a legitimate form of government, with clearly defined responsibilities. A new fiscal relationship between the three levels of government also needs to be established.

Harry Daniels of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples pointed out some of the inequities in constitutional language regarding Aboriginal Peoples. Many Aboriginal People do not fall under the category of "First Nations"; they fall through the cracks in current constitutional language, despite what were thought to be gains made in previous constitutional negotiations. Another key problem that both Chief Fontaine and Harry Daniels identified is the refusal of federal and provincial governments to take responsibility for dealing with Aboriginal Peoples living off-reserve. The federal government insists that they are a provincial responsibility. The provinces resist this, particularly as they are already suffering from massive cuts to transfer payments. Meanwhile, there are some serious

problems that need to be addressed, especially in urban centres. “Our place in Canada is very fragile”, said Daniels. “We’re caught up in the whims of governments”. Despite this uncertainty, many First Nations and Aboriginal organizations are making significant efforts to address the many challenges facing Aboriginal Peoples living off reserve and in urban centres.

The New Democratic Party must work closely with Aboriginal groups to develop more comprehensive policies on Aboriginal issues, and to determine the best avenues for securing justice for Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. In this respect, our dialogue has just begun.

Recommendation #3: That the federal NDP reaffirms its commitment to the inherent right of self-government for Aboriginal Peoples.

Recommendation #4: That the federal NDP shall establish a regular dialogue with organizations representing Aboriginal groups. In conjunction with the Aboriginal Caucus and organizations representing Aboriginal Peoples, the Party shall develop a strategy to help implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Recommendations on fiscal and economic issues, as well as recommendations on protecting aboriginal languages, should be major priorities. This strategy should include focused objectives and a timeline for achieving those objectives.

Recognizing and Respecting the Québec People in a Meaningful Way

Participants in the Forum overwhelmingly expressed a desire to find a way to recognize Quebecers as a people. Most Forum participants were supportive of accommodations which would allow Québec an opportunity to opt out of Canada-wide social programs with compensation, largely because they see a great commitment to social democratic principles in Québec -- a spirit of collective responsibility that stands as an example to the rest of Canada. There was a clear consensus supporting the NDP’s long-standing policy that Quebecers must determine their own future. As well, many participants agreed that English Canada has a responsibility to “accept the ways in which Québec enriches the rest of Canada” (Saanich-Gulf Islands Submission). One participant remarked, “the probability that cooperative federalism will ‘stick’ depends upon the protections offered by a social charter, and the unequivocal respect and sensitivity needed by other Canadians and their representatives.” Prince Edward Island participants stated that

Recognition must be given to the unique situation of Québec as the primary guardian of the French language and culture in North America. Consequently, the government of Québec must be allowed to use the necessary tools to combat the threat of assimilation posed by Québec’s

location in a 'sea of English', a sea dominated by the 'tidal wave' produced by the American entertainment media.

In Alberta, participants pointed out that English Canadians need to educate themselves about the importance of language to Quebecers -- to break the barriers between provinces and between cultures in order to understand each other better.

Responsive Federalism must include a recognition, enshrined in the Constitution, of Quebecers as a people. Canada as a society has not yet found a form of words that would express this recognition in a meaningful way. We believe that these words must be found.

Canada is diverse in four distinct ways: Aboriginal Peoples; multiculturalism; two official languages; and the two immigrant societies that converge around each of these languages. The first three are already recognized in the Constitution. We are determined to find the best way of recognizing the fourth - that is, the reality of Canada as a dual immigrant society is at the heart of Quebecers' existence as a people.

We call for a new understanding of what constitutes a people -- one not based on the narrow confines of ethnicity but on the recognition that a community is united by shared values and common goals. Contemporary Québec society is dynamic and diverse, shaped and enriched by several waves of immigration from all corners of the globe as well as by the contribution of Aboriginal Peoples. As the centre of one of two linguistic societies to which immigrants to Canada have come to belong, Québec has a role in the federation that is different from that of all other provinces. Responsive federalism recognizes this, for example, by applying the principle of asymmetry to the development of a Social Union.

Forum participants overwhelmingly affirmed the New Democratic Party's policy that the people of Québec have the right to decide, democratically, their own future. Although the NDP opposed the reference to the Supreme Court, the panel notes that the court's judgement did in fact reinforce the long-standing NDP view that the future of Quebec within Canada is ultimately a political question and not a legal one.

Recommendation #5: That the NDP maintains its determination to find a meaningful constitutional recognition of Quebecers as a people. New Democrats embrace the fact that Québec is a diverse, multi-ethnic society, the centre of one of the two linguistic societies to which immigrants to Canada have come to belong. We must strive to find the best way to recognize this reality in the Constitution.

The NDP reasserts the principle that Québec must have the tools necessary to respond to its unique challenges as the centre of one of the two immigrant societies within Canada. This principle is reflected in the

recognition that asymmetry is an important part of a responsive Social Union.

Protecting French-speaking Minorities

Francophone communities outside Québec also face tremendous challenges in trying to preserve their culture. Cutbacks in the federal public service, the cancellation of federal programs and downloading to provinces and territories have meant a significant reduction in services to Francophones outside of Québec. These minority communities, however, have shown impressive determination to fight for their survival. As proof we offer the remarkable show of solidarity displayed by Ontarians -- both Francophone and non-Francophone - as they rallied in convincing numbers last year to save the province's only French-language teaching hospital.

The New Democratic Party has a proud history of defending linguistic minorities in Canada, both in Parliament and in provincial legislatures. In Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, the Yukon and British Columbia, NDP governments have adopted important legislation to protect and promote French language minority institutions: in some cases establishing French language school boards, in others setting up or expanding French language services.

NDP members of provincial legislatures have also fought tough battles to defend rights of French-speaking citizens in provinces where we have not yet formed government, such as Alberta, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. We are proud to say that no other Canadian political party has such a consistent record of commitment to Francophone minority rights at the provincial, territorial and the federal level.

Recommendation #6: That New Democrats continue to vigorously support the rights of French-speaking minorities outside of Québec to have access to the tools they need to preserve and develop their language and culture. New Democrats must assert that the principles of co-decision incorporate a recognition of these rights.

Revitalizing our Democracy

It is clear from Forum discussions that Canadians feel detached from the democratic process and from governments in general. There is a tremendous amount of cynicism about governments' role in our society, and about governments' ability to make Canadians' lives better. Many feel that their vote does not make a difference, that citizens have no voice between elections, that politicians in general are untrustworthy. Participants of all ages expressed a great deal of concern about the lack of hope among young Canadians in particular.

This is a disturbing and destructive trend -- particularly for New Democrats, who believe strongly in the democratic process and in the role of government. In democratic societies, electoral politics is the main avenue for building public institutions and programs that cradle the equality of citizens. With a weakening of these institutions and of the democratic culture that sustains them, individuals face a world of even greater inequality of power than exists now.

Many Forum participants commented on the important role of grassroots community organizations, advocacy groups, NGOs and coalitions -- in other words, social movements -- to enhance democracy and foster a commitment to the public good. The New Democratic Party is in a unique position to recognize and embrace this fact, given the Party's formal recognition and relationship with the trade union movement, as well as the active participation of many members in community-based, provincial and national organizations. The NDP has elaborated on this issue in the report of the 1995 Renewal Process.

The growing cynicism about electoral politics has been exploited and fueled by powerful interests on the right, which have a clear motive in discrediting public institutions. Tragically, some of those active in advocacy groups that share our progressive goals have also grown cynical about electoral democracy. It is therefore an urgent task for all Canadians to work towards the revitalization of our democratic culture and institutions.

The task of revitalizing democracy in Canada is made all the more challenging by the threats posed to democratic institutions by international trade agreements. With trade rules that allow unaccountable tribunals to override the legitimate decisions of elected governments, and procedures that allow corporations to challenge governments as equals under trade rules, public institutions are losing ground to powerful private interests. The recent success of the campaign to stop the MAI, waged in Parliament by the NDP and in civil society by citizens' organizations, shows that, together, we can fight back.

Panel members agree that Responsive Federalism must include a commitment to make our federal institutions more democratic and responsive to the realities of Canada's federal character and its geographic and cultural communities. This reform would encompass the following four areas.

Electoral Reform: Many participants were firmly committed to implementing some form of proportional representation. Many advantages to some form of PR were suggested. In the present system, a majority of Canadians almost always vote for unsuccessful candidates. As a result, many feel they have "lost" their vote and are not represented in Parliament. This contributes to the sense of estrangement many Canadians have regarding Ottawa. A system of PR would increase the percentage of Canadians with someone in Ottawa who represented both their region and their political perspective. This would not only contribute to Canadians' sense that the House of Commons belonged to them, it would also reduce regional frictions. Most participants agreed that proportional

representation would result in a more dynamic and equitable democracy in Canada.

While few participants were specific about which model of PR they favoured, there was clear consensus that the New Democratic Party should take this on as a major campaign. The Forum notes that a discussion paper has already been prepared and distributed within the New Democratic Party, and we look forward to a comprehensive policy proposal coming from the Sub-committee on Proportional Representation.

Senate: There was clear consensus that the current undemocratic Senate is unacceptable. Participants reaffirmed the Party's traditional position that the current Senate must be abolished. There was no agreement, however, on whether it should be replaced. Bob Rae told the Forum that there is no federation in the world that does not have a second chamber. Many Forum participants felt that a house of sober second thought is important to keep the federal government accountable -- it just shouldn't be the second chamber we have now. Some participants advocated learning from the German, Indian or Irish examples.

Howard Pawley suggested that abolishing the Senate and electing 60 additional members to the House of Commons through proportional representation would be more appropriate than Senate reform. Some participants thought a constituent assembly might be a good alternative. It is significant that there were no advocates of the triple-E senate at Forum events.

Strengthening social movements: The importance of advocacy groups to protect and invigorate democracy in Canada and provide a voice for the voiceless has recently been demonstrated in Geneva, where advocacy groups presented an alternative report on Canada's human rights record to a UN committee assessing our compliance with the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. As a result of the intervention of those groups, the committee condemned Canada for several violations of human rights by the federal Liberal government and by some provincial governments.

The Chrétien government has made it difficult for many groups to function. Changes to the funding mechanisms for social movement groups have put the future of many valuable organizations into question. Some provincial governments are also making changes that are stifling the voice of this important sector of our society. At a meeting with several advocacy groups (including the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, the Canadian Ethnocultural Council, the National Farmer's Union, the Canadian Federation of Students, and the National Anti-Poverty Organization) we heard a great deal about the impacts of the loss of core funding upon some organizations, and the effects that threats of changes have had on others. Participants in that meeting stated that, by undermining democratic organizations fighting for social and economic rights, the government was undermining democracy.

The Canadian Ethnocultural Council, an umbrella organization that includes about 30 national ethnocultural groups, pointed out that there must be a place for groups to participate as part of a civil society. It's a way of leveling the playing field. The Council expressed concern about the increasingly narrow definition of equality and its impact on their communities. Equality shouldn't mean treating everyone the same. According to the Canadian Ethnocultural Council, it should mean ensuring that everyone is able to participate in a democratic society

Head of State: Somewhat surprisingly, the question of the future of the head of state resonated with many participants -- although most feel that this is not a priority for Canadians at this time. A significant number of respondents suggested that Canada should begin the process of Canadianizing the head of state. But they advocated a cautious approach; one that, for example, involves keeping a close eye on Australia as that country undertakes its process of becoming a republic.

Recommendation #7: That the New Democratic Party vigorously advocates the revitalization of Canadian democracy through the development and promotion of :

- a form of proportional representation that is appropriate for Canada -- a system of proportional representation would contribute to Canadians' sense that the House of Commons belonged to them and would reduce regional frictions, resulting in a more dynamic and equitable democracy in Canada.
- the abolition of the existing undemocratic Senate -- New Democrats maintain that the existing undemocratic Senate is unacceptable and must be abolished.
- strengthening the independent social movements -- independent social movements protect and invigorate democracy in Canada. We must ensure that these groups are able to pursue their important role in building a better Canada.
- **canadianizing the head of state -- Canada should begin to explore the possibility of Canadianizing the head of state. However, this is not a priority for Canadians at this time. We advocate a cautious approach, one that involves, for example, keeping a close eye on Australia as that country undertakes its process of becoming a republic.**
- A system of state-funded campaign financing, possibly modeled after the system currently being used in Quebec, must be implemented to curb that influence that business and the rich have over the democratic and electoral process.

These democratic reforms should provide for an array of democratic institutions that are responsive to particular traits of the Canadian reality. New Democrats look forward to a future where Canadians will have a greater sense of control over their lives because they have greater confidence in an enhanced Canadian democracy.

6 Conclusion

From coast to coast to coast, Forum participants emphasized that dialogue, cooperation, and a commitment to shared values are fundamental to Canada's success.

In this report, we offer a vision of Canadian federalism that extends and refines the New Democratic Party's founding principles of cooperative federalism and recognition for the Aboriginal and Québec Peoples. It is a progressive, proactive vision that responds to the realities of contemporary Canadian society, and reflects the aspirations and priorities of the social democrats who participated in our dialogue.

Responsive Federalism creates a climate of cooperation, mutual respect and collective responsibility. Co-decision will bring governments together to develop and maintain strong social programs with pan-Canadian standards, while allowing the flexibility to administer programs in a way that meets the needs of particular geographic, cultural and linguistic communities. Our framework contains measures that will hold all levels of government accountable and ensures that all Canadians achieve their social, economic and cultural rights. Responsive Federalism will help to bring about a Social Union truly capable of achieving social justice.

Responsive Federalism guarantees meaningful recognition to Aboriginal Peoples, by reaffirming the principle of self-government and including Aboriginal governments in the Social Union process.

Responsive Federalism guarantees meaningful recognition to the Québec People. Canadians should rejoice in our country's singular existence as a dual immigrant society that converges around two public languages: English and French. We must find the best way to recognize this fundamental duality in the constitution, as well as the corresponding responsibility of Québec as the geographic centre of Canada's French-speaking population.

Responsive Federalism would revitalize Canadian democracy through a series of democratic reforms. A system of proportional representation, the abolition of the existing undemocratic Senate, a Canadianized head of state, and a strong network of social movements all will contribute to a healthy democratic system that can act as a source of pride and confidence for all Canadians.

Social Democratic Forum on Canada's Future Recommendations

Responsive Federalism

Recommendation #1: Our goal is to build a Canada that recognizes and responds to the needs of its citizens -- and acknowledges the many ways in which our country is diverse. Canadians need guarantees that their basic social, economic, environmental cultural and democratic rights will be protected and promoted by all levels of government.

Accordingly, the NDP advocates a new framework for Canada: Responsive Federalism, based on the principles of co-decision and the recognition of the Canadian diversity. Responsive Federalism is a framework which recognizes and responds to the geographic, cultural and linguistic diversity of the Canadian federation, including the unique situations of the Aboriginal and Québec Peoples, and by which governments work cooperatively to promote the social, cultural and economic well-being of all Canadians. Responsive Federalism includes the following elements:

- **Affirming our Social and Economic Rights: A Social Union Based on the Principle of Co-decision**
- **Protecting our Charter of Rights and Freedoms for all Canadians**
- **Securing Justice for Aboriginal Peoples and First Nations**
- **Recognizing and Respecting the Québec People in a Meaningful Way**
- **Protecting French-Speaking Minorities**
- **Revitalizing Democracy**

Affirming our Social and Economic Rights: A Social Union Based on the Principle of Co-decision

Recommendation #2: That the New Democratic Party advocates Social Union arrangements that would develop and maintain Canada-wide social policy by co-decision. A responsive Social Union would act as a covenant between governments and citizens. It would guarantee Canadians equal access to a wide range of quality social programs, recognize and respond to the diversity of our federation and its citizens, and ensure that we meet our obligations under international human rights agreements. Co-decision, a process by which governments work cooperatively to develop priorities for social policy and to set Canada-wide standards for social programs, would foster a sense of collective responsibility and cooperation.

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Funding

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- An independent Accountability Panel would be created under the Social Union to assess whether governments are fulfilling their obligations under Social Union agreements and whether the social rights of

Canadians are being respected. This body would be composed in such a way as to reflect the geographic, cultural and linguistic diversity of the federation. The Accountability Panel would report annually to the Social Rights Commission.

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Recommendation #5: That the NDP maintains its determination to find a meaningful constitutional recognition of Quebecers as a people. New Democrats embrace the fact that Québec is a diverse, multi-ethnic society, the centre of one of the two linguistic societies to which immigrants to Canada have come to belong. We must strive to find the best way to recognize this reality in the Constitution.

The NDP reasserts the principle that Québec must have the tools necessary to respond to its unique challenges as the centre of one of the two immigrant societies within Canada. This principle is reflected in the recognition that asymmetry is an important part of a responsive Social Union.

Protecting French-Speaking Minorities

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Recommendation #7: That the New Democratic Party vigorously advocates the revitalization of Canadian democracy through the development and promotion of :

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- the abolition of the existing undemocratic Senate -- New Democrats maintain that the existing undemocratic Senate is unacceptable and must be abolished.
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- **canadianizing the head of state -- Canada should begin to explore the possibility of canadianizing the head of state. However, this is not a priority for Canadians at this time. We advocate a cautious approach, one that involves, for example, keeping a close eye on Australia as that country undertakes its process of becoming a republic.**
- a system of state-funded campaign financing, possibly modeled after the system currently being used in Quebec, must be implemented to curb that influence that business and the rich have over the democratic and electoral process.

These democratic reforms should provide for an array of democratic institutions that are responsive to particular traits of the Canadian reality. New Democrats look forward to a future where Canadians will have a greater sense of control over their lives because they have greater confidence in an enhanced Canadian democracy.