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WHAT'S INSIDE

AN INTERESTING Ten Years

A decade after the defeat of the Charlottetown Accord, constitutional reform is no longer seen as a priority in either our corridors of power or at dinner tables across the country. And yet electoral reform is a hot topic of conversation and debate. What bridges the present date to the brief Charlottetown era? Nothing less than the state of the Canadian democracy.

Who in Canada is satisfied with the status quo? Who seeks radical changes, who more moderate ones? Why are Canadians so interested in the way we elect our representatives? Is reform possible, likely, simple? And perhaps most importantly, what do the failure of Charlottetown or the prospects of future reform say about the kind of country we are? Our esteemed contributors attempt to answer these and other critical questions and, together, offer a revealing glimpse into the Canadian democracy – past, present and future.

Senator Gérald-A Beaudoin leads off with an important summary of recent attempts at constitutional change and concludes that securing such change any time soon will be anything but easy. Nathalie Des Rosiers follows with a question of her own – is this the time to seek electoral reform? If it is, she suggests, any debate must directly involve the citizenry of Canada.

William Cross and Lisa Young point to the recent reforms of our political parties as perhaps the exception to the lack of significant movement elsewhere. Howard Pawley explains why the Charlottetown Accord failed and suggests that its success may not have provided all the benefits it once promised. Stephane Bernatchez examines the evolution of Canadian constitutional law, at least within the judicial realm, in light of the constitutional failure on the political front. What we have seen, he believes, are emerging forms of democracy that lead us away from traditional representative democracy.

John Graham begins his article with the conclusion that our democracy is in trouble and then offers the town hall meeting as a possible model on the road to something better. Andrew Parkin looks specifically at one controversial element of potential democratic reform – greater use of the referendum. The citizenry might have greater influence on the political agenda, but would referendums as we know them now bring more problems than they solve? Jack Jedwab joins the discussion with a statistical look at how shifting regional demographics alter the representative presence in the House of Commons and help decide elections. He submits that demography could play an important role in changing the way the nation is governed.

Debates on demographic trends and the possibilities for electoral reform are not confined to Canada. Steven Hill reacts to the stark divisions on the American political map and proposes that an outdated electoral system may be contributing to, as he puts it, a political depression that is sucking the life out of politics. Alex Folkes informs us of efforts across Europe to strengthen, broaden and refresh democratic structures. In the UK, a list of measures including changing to more proportional voting systems and taking the decision-making out of the hands of politicians are being tried.

The Association for *Canadian Studies* is proud to offer this special edition of *Canadian Issues* at its Montreal conference *Constitution and Democracy: Ten Years after the Charlottetown Accord.* The editors hope it contributes to a stimulating debate.