

Spicer Commission

The 'Spicer Commission', formally known as the Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future, was part of the Mulroney government's efforts to lay the groundwork for the Charlottetown Accord. The Commission consisted of twelve prominent Canadians from across the country led by the former Commissioner of Official Languages, Keith Spicer. Starting in January 1991, the forum solicited briefs from organizations, held public hearings across the country, and urged Canadians to communicate their opinions in as many ways as possible. About 400,000 people in all availed themselves of the opportunity but only 11.2 percent of responses came from Quebec. The forum delivered its final report on 27 June 1991.

Unfortunately for the government, the most unanimous opinion revealed by the process was a general dislike and mistrust of the Prime Minister. On a number of general constitutional issues such as whether provincial or federal powers should be increased, deep divisions were apparent between Quebec and the rest of Canada. The forum unexpectedly revealed substantial public discontent with such settled policies as bilingualism and multiculturalism. The forum made a number of recommendations, most of which were bland and predictable: Senate reform, recognition of Quebec uniqueness, and recognition of Aboriginal rights. The recommendation for a constituent assembly was perhaps the most novel initiative. The failure of the Charlottetown process suggests that the Citizens' Forum neither built consensus nor allayed public fears about constitutional change.

Sources:

- D. Leyton-Brown, ed., *Canadian Annual Review of Politics and Public Affairs 1991* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).
- *Citizen's Forum on Canada's Future: Report to the People and Government of Canada* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1991).