

# Editorial

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Do you agree that the Constitution of Canada should be renewed on the basis of the agreement reached on August 28, 1992?

Acceptez-vous que la Constitution du Canada soit renouvelée sur la base de l'entente conclue le 28 août 1992?

Here it is, fellow Canadians: the question we'll be asked in the referendum vote in all its bilingual glory. The referendum is fast approaching, October 26 to be precise, and we all have to make up our minds as to whether or not we approve of the proposed constitutional changes. It's a big decision, but unfortunately, it may end up being simply the latest in a seemingly interminable series of frustratingly futile attempts to redefine the constitution of our country.

The referendum question is unquestionably difficult to answer, but a reluctant "yes" vote would probably be the lesser of the two evils. The new deal definitely has problems: contentious issues are everywhere, including transfer of powers to the provinces (which many fear will weaken federal power and undermine the standards of current educational programs if provinces are given the option to individually control them), aboriginal self-government (which many fear will further erode Federal authority and further burden taxpayers by creating a third level of government within Canada), and concessions to Quebec such as a guarantee for Quebec of 25% of the House of Commons seats in perpetuity and three of the Supreme Court posts, not to mention a veto option on bills concerning French language and culture, and black-and-white recognition of that old Leech Lake chestnut, "Distinct Society." There's more than a few controversial points in this deal.

We should keep in mind, though, that dispute is a natural part of compromise, and a compromise is the one thing that this deal most definitely is. If we think back a bit we can see that this deal, flawed or not, was the culmination of years of debate, negotiation, and research, and it was endorsed by the most impressively wide array of elected representatives of Canadians that any constitution of ours has ever enjoyed. You can't really get a much stronger consensus than the one this deal got, and it leads one to wonder: what the blazes do Canadians want from the constitution anyway? There's no way to give every group everything they want, realistically speaking, so we can't expect perfection. This deal gives at least some consideration to most of the major players, and while it may not be perfect we've never had a perfect constitution in the first place, as made obvious by the fact that we're sitting here trying to transform our present constitution in a few dozen places. Do

we really want to waste a few more million of the tax payers' dollars and what little patience Canadians may still have by going back to square one on this ghastly mess? How many constitutional corners can Canada paint itself into before it starts to run out of floor?

There may be a lot of voices against the new constitutional package, but think for a moment about who they are: the Bloc Quebecois, the Reform Party, the Partie Quebecois, the Confederation of Regents Party, N.A.C. ... what do these groups have in common? Answer: while some of them may be well-intentioned, they are groups who are more concerned with their personal agendas than with the welfare of the country as a whole. Some of these groups would as soon spit

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*"How many constitutional corners can Canada paint itself into...?"*

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on each other as work together. What sort of Canada would be built by self-interested opportunists like Preston Manning and Jacques Parizeau? They offer no constructive option, and the new constitutional package is the only thing at the moment that does, warts and all.

The ideal thing would be for this whole fiasco to go away, to be conveniently forgotten so that we can concentrate on more pressing concerns like the economy. It seems to be too late for that, though; since we've opened this Pandora's Box of a debate there may be no way to successfully close it until we reach some kind of decision. Of the two decisions we can make on October 26, a "yes" to the deal will at least give our elected representatives the go-ahead to work out a final resolution to the dilemma, while a "no" vote will simply dump the country back into a cycle of internal strife and resultant political and financial instability. A "yes" vote won't automatically solve all our problems either, but it doesn't have to. The "Charlottetown Accord" we're voting on isn't law yet, and if we have to we can tinker with it later even if it is made law, just as we're modifying our present constitution; plus, in case you've forgotten, a referendum isn't legally binding. It won't automatically lock us into one plan forever, so we shouldn't hesitate to make a decisive, positive step forward. Canada deserves that much.

Sean McQuaid  
Editeur

P.S. My Canada includes *Flacons de Mais*.