



# The Tools For The Job

What lingers is the untrammelled emotion of the 12 Canadians who took part in a unique *Maclean's* experiment from June 7 to 10. The magazine had formed the group by choosing its members from so-called thought clusters that Decima Research, *Maclean's* regular polling firm, had singled out as representing the dominant lines of thinking in the nation. They ranged from committed Quebec separatists to ardent centralists. They met at a secluded Ontario resort, the Briars on Lake Simcoe, with Harvard law professor Roger Fisher, a pioneer in conflict resolution theory, and two of his colleagues, Stuart Diamond and Robert Ricigliano, from the Cambridge, Mass.-based Conflict Management Group. Not only are they the best in their field, but the participants welcomed them as non-Canadians who brought a dispassionate attitude to the task given to the 12 Canadians: to see if there is still enough will and ability among representative Canadians to create a framework for a new and acceptable country. At the end of the process, they did just that—not by drafting a formal constitution or a legal document of any kind, but by developing a vision with which they all agreed, a statement of national principles and some details of a renewed federation, a package that all 12 participants enthusiastically signed. The document even contains a specific action plan for implementing the reforms that they recommended.

But one of the most striking elements of the remarkable weekend was the sheer strength of the emotional attachment

that the participants showed for Canada—either Canada as it is, or a Canada that could be. And as that kind of Canadian-ness emerged, it did so untinged by the traditional undercurrent of anti-Americanism. In fact, when Ricigliano, a young, no-nonsense Harvard law graduate, had to leave early, his attempt to depart quietly was interrupted by a woman from Quebec who had gone to the Briars as a committed separatist. She embraced him and wept openly. Then, the others followed her, some of them weeping too. Finally, Ricigliano himself began to cry and Fisher, standing in the background, began to dab at tears.

In the end, Diamond said, it seemed clear that the techniques used at the Briars could be applied on the national level to resolve some of Canada's most intractable constitutional problems. Added Diamond: "The real lesson is that a dozen people, selected for their differences and representative of various Canadian viewpoints, could, over a weekend, deal effectively with their differences and come to agreements, using a systematic process of analysis and discussion."

That observation gains significance because some prominent Canadians are now quietly discussing the establishment of a radically different constituent assembly, elected provincially and made up of about 70 citizens who are not politically active, to draw up a new constitution that would then be voted on in provincial referendums and, if approved by all of them, would be adopted by all legislatures in the country to become law. Fisher's conflict resolution methods would be a priceless tool in such a process.

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# THE PEOPLE'S VERDICT



## Macleans

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The British North America Act created a state, but in its ambiguity it also set off a constitutional power struggle that haunts Canada 124 years later.

*The 15 participants, left to right: Stuart Diamond, John Prall, Viola Cerezke-Schooler, Charles Dupuis, Marie LeBeau, Roger Fisher, Sheila Simpson, Karen Adams, Carol Geddes, Cyril Alleyne, Karren Collings, Richard Miller, Colin Finn, Robert Lalande and Robert Ricigliano.*