



Negotiator Robert Ricigliano (second from left) discusses details with Dupuis (left), LeBeau and Miller: a human dimension

A Canadian Renewal

Representative citizens find new ways to reinvent the country



They were Canadians. And as Canadians, their conclusions were characteristically modest: no ringing declaration of rights or statement of demands, but "joint suggestions" for their fellow citizens to consider. Each of the 12 participants in the *Maclean's*

weekend forum on Canada's future was articulate and concerned for the country, but no one was an expert in the framing of constitutions or the procedural details of politics. And they were working under a severe time constraint: three days in which to determine whether they could develop a vision for a united Canada. As a result, their proposals were predictably incomplete. Not all were original. Many of them were parallel to initiatives that are already under way. And all are open to criticism of one sort or another. But, taken together, the suggestions that bear the signature of all 12 participants are an inspiring joint creation. And as the authors intended, they represent significant steps

towards a country "in which all Canadians would feel fully accepted, at home, fairly treated and with an appropriate balance between national concerns and local autonomy" (full text: page 52).

The participants concluded that change must extend far beyond the dry wording of the Constitution. They pointed to three critical areas that require attention. Under the subheading "Mutual Understanding," their proposals call for a conscious effort on the part of Canadians to open their hearts and minds to the differences among the regions, cultures and communities that make up the nation. On economic matters, they urge Prime Minister Brian Mulroney to restore direction to the economy by convening leading industrialists, researchers and consultants to draw up a "national plan" that would see the country's resources used to the greatest national advantage. And they suggest sweeping change at the sclerotic heart of the political impasse: Ottawa. Their recommendations, if implemented, would dramatically weaken the power of all political parties, forcing elected representatives to become far more responsive

to their voters. "That would create a Canada you could believe in," commented Marie LeBeau, a computer programmer from Hull, Que., who came to the forum a committed separatist, as the proposals took shape. As her enthusiasm mounted, she added: "Don't you like it? Wouldn't it be fun?"

That new Canada would certainly respond to concerns that have been raised with growing urgency well beyond the pastoral tranquillity of the Briars resort in central Ontario, where the forum gathered. A flurry of recent opinion polls—including the seventh annual *Maclean's*/Decima year-end poll, published in January—have underscored the priority that Canadians place on restoring confidence in the economy, as well as their profound disillusionment with the institutions of Parliament.

Many of the experts canvassed by *Maclean's* about the forum's proposals also strongly endorsed the conviction that no constitutional tinkering can succeed if Canadians fail to overcome their entrenched regional and communal jealousies. "The problem we have," said Thomas d'Aquino, president of the nonpartisan Business Council on National Issues, "is that people are so suspicious of everyone else's agenda. That is really the big challenge."

At the same time, the 12 Canadians devoted comparatively little attention to some of the most heated issues that dominate the debate among constitutional experts. The question of language was raised and briefly discussed—but proved not to be highly contentious. Neither multiculturalism nor Quebec's demand for explicit recognition in the Constitution as a "distinct society" emerged as pivotal points. As for the thorny problem of what formula should replace the current unwieldy method of amending the Constitution, the participants acknowledged that they were not equipped to offer specific new suggestions.

Still, the forum participants reached agreement on creative resolutions to critical challenges that confront the country in three key areas. Indeed, polls and other soundings of public opinion offer strong support for the priorities set out by the *Maclean's* forum in its united attempt to define a new Canada. In *Maclean's* year-end poll, 59 per cent of Canadians surveyed said that economic concerns—ranging from taxation to unemployment—outranked national unity as the most important issue facing the country. A poll by Gallup Canada Inc. later the same month reached a similar conclusion.

There is a comparable national consensus that politicians must become more responsive to those who elect them: 60 per cent of Canadians questioned in the *Maclean's* poll said that they wanted a more direct role in the decisions of government; 77 per cent said that governments should be required to consult the public before making major decisions. Later reports by other pollsters buttressed those findings as well. Gallup, for one, reported that almost three-quarters of respondents to a May 1 to 4 poll said that Canada would be better off if its leaders followed the views of the people more closely. One result, as the conclusions reached by the *Maclean's* forum suggest, could be a historic shift in favor of a government closer to the American model than the British.

On two other important issues, the 12 Canadians who participated in the *Maclean's* forum appear to reflect accurately the views of their fellow citizens. In conclusions due to be released this week, the federal Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future, chaired by Keith Spicer, will report its finding that "the majority of Canadians" now demand that the unresolved claims of native people should be addressed. The same theme ran throughout the conclusions of the *Maclean's* forum. The Spicer commission's report will also recommend a review of official

bilingualism, and note that "the policy is a major irritant outside Quebec and not much appreciated inside Quebec." When the *Maclean's* forum participants—six men and six women, including four Quebecers—discussed the language issue, there was surprisingly little disagreement.

At one stage, Nova Scotia biology teacher John Prall asserted that "bilingualism, legislated right across Canada, was a mistake"—a view that 63 per cent of all Canadians and 65 per cent of Quebecers share, according to Gallup. In response, the committed federalist among the Quebecers, Robert Lalonde, a technical instructor from Gatineau, near Ottawa, observed that when "you push people against a corner, they have a tendency to want to push back." He added: "It is better to do it voluntarily." Later, LeBeau told Prall that with or without the protection of official bilingualism, "I am not afraid of losing my language. I haven't lost it in 200 years."

But the *Maclean's* participants were more concerned with proposals that might unite the nation over its vast distances and divergent communities than with the divisive thrust of bilingualism. Indeed, their first recommendation had no direct bearing on either the machinery of politics or the pursuit of prosperity. "We suggest," the forum participants wrote, "that Canadians devote substantial effort to the human dimension—to understanding one another, to caring and sharing their concerns and ideas." And strikingly, they expressed a sentiment that may be far more widely held than many political leaders acknowledge. Two recent findings by Gallup, at least, point towards the same conclusion.

In one, 76 per cent of all Canadians polled—and 59 per cent of Quebecers—favored the singing of *O Canada* at sporting events. And in another, 77 per cent of people surveyed said that they considered the national CBC television network to be necessary to preserving the country. Declared participant Carol Geddes, a film-maker from Whitehorse, Yukon, expressing a shared perception among forum members: "Canadians don't know one another."

Still, after a weekend of deliberation, debate and frequently emotional encounters, the 12 Canadians who participated in the *Maclean's*

forum reached agreement on a statement of general principles that formed a four-paragraph preamble. The rest of the document that they drafted is a detailed array of specific recommendations, arranged to focus on three critical areas:

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

In 1936, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King remarked: "If some countries have too much history, we have too much geography." Seldom has that fact been more evident. Divided by climate, topography and distance, and preoccupied with different economic imperatives, "Canadians," the *Maclean's* forum concluded, "have become increasingly concerned with their own immediate interests and those of their neighbors, their immediate community and their province—and are more likely to ignore the interests of minorities, of other groups and of other provinces."

Indeed, it quickly became apparent how little the 12 participants themselves understood one another's experiences and viewpoints. Their three-day voyage of mutual discovery, however, produced a remarkably optimistic set of suggestions for their fellow citizens. As their final document noted, "Constitutional questions have a better chance of being well handled if Canadians work together with greater understanding, empathy, tolerance, genuine concern and a willingness to share."

The forum addressed its suggestions first to Canadians themselves. Said Lalonde: "We have politicians who represent us—we elected them.



Adams: 'terrified' of government

THE PEOPLE'S VERDICT

If we want to change something in government, we had better change ourselves." But their proposals extended to specific groups, as well: to the teachers who shape the perceptions of young Canadians, to service clubs such as the Kiwanis and Rotary organizations whose networks span provincial and linguistic boundaries, to the media, and to provincial and federal governments. To the latter, the forum directed an innovative idea that reflected the members' confidence in the ability of Canadians from all walks of life to solve many of the country's problems—if politicians give them the opportunity. They urged Ottawa to appoint a commission whose objective would be "to find programs or projects in one province that are successful, and promote their replication in other areas."

Other proposals covered as wide a scope. Noting that "there are places in Canada as marvellous as those elsewhere," participants in the *Maclean's* forum urged their fellow citizens to travel more widely within the country, and, while travelling, to "establish personal contact with others through professional, business or other connections." Said participant Cyril Alleyne, a Montreal vault-and-safe company manager: "A lot of Quebecers do not visit the rest of Canada. They visit more [of] the United States than they do their own country."

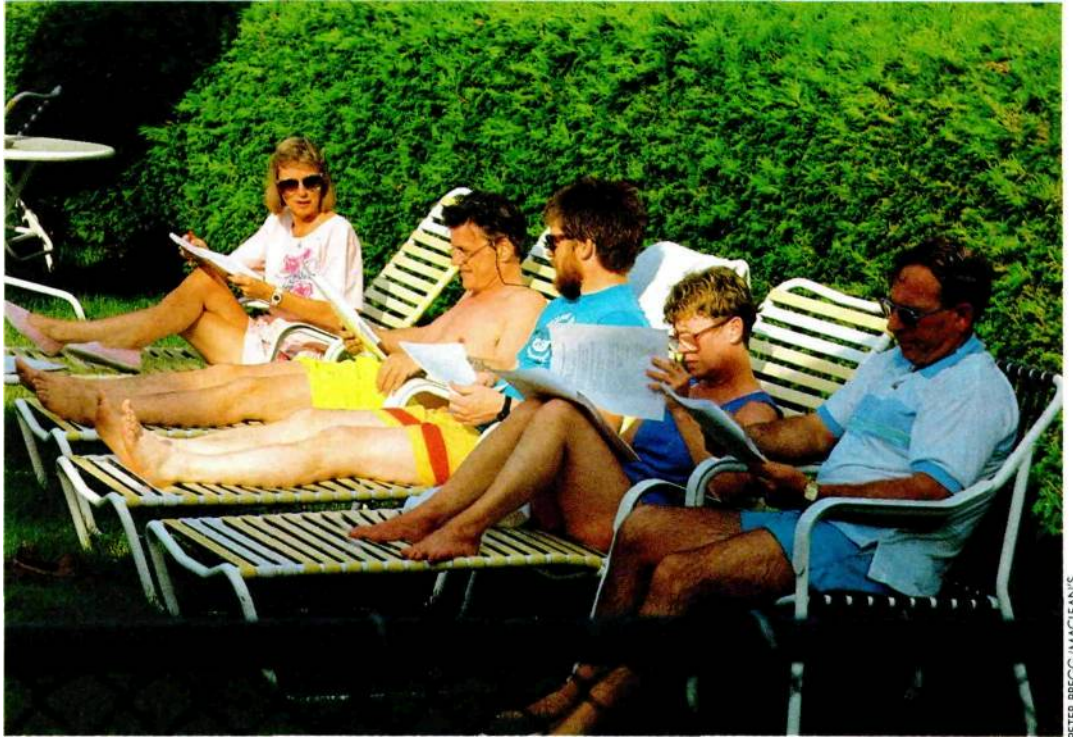
To change that practice, the forum urged service clubs to sponsor package trips within Canada among their members. It also called on corporations to "consider business travel and meetings as opportunities to meet other Canadians."

But many of the participants' most compelling proposals for reintroducing Canadians to themselves were directed at schools—and at provincial departments of education. Their reasoning was straightforward: Canada's youngest citizens "are our future," said Karren Ceilings, a nurse—and mother of a teenager—who lives in rural southern Ontario. "They are the ones we should be trying to educate and help to become aware." To that end, the forum urged educators to "compare curricula with teachers from other schools in Canada for fairness," and to "invite guest speakers from different parts of Canada" into their schools.

Participants also recommended that departments of education "work with those in other provinces on curriculum changes to promote closer 'all-Canada' understanding [and] arrange, as a national project, for the writing of a good history of all Canadians for all Canadians." Declared LeBeau: "The first subject in school would be Canada 101."

That clearly is not the case now. In fact, a survey published by the Council of Ministers of Education earlier this year revealed that most provincial and territorial junior high-school and secondary-school curricula contain fewer than half a dozen courses devoted to Canadian history, geography, civics or culture. The curricula in Alberta and Quebec offer only two such courses. In addition, notes Mark Holmes, a professor of education administration at Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, the requirement for provincial certification inhibits the movement of teachers from one region to another. As a result, said Holmes, "Canadians, especially young Canadians, are very ignorant of other provinces."

Other experts note that even when courses about Canada are offered, they may contribute more to regional resentment than to mutual understanding. "You can have Canadian studies that still promote the various ideological hatreds," remarked historian Desmond Morton, principal of the University of Toronto's Erindale campus. Recalling his own Prairie school days, Morton noted: "I learned how the West was oppressed by evil easterners, because that was what was taught in Saskatchewan in 1947 and 1948." In New Brunswick, which leads all other provinces in offering its junior- and high-school students 11 Canadian studies courses—five of those compulsory—Premier Frank McKenna acknowledged: "Young people here know absolutely nothing



Studying the final draft: strong measures to make politicians more responsive to voters

about the West—and vice versa." He added: "One of the big roadblocks in achieving national unity is a complete lack of understanding of our mutual aspirations."

His comment underscored the urgency expressed by the *Maclean's* forum for individual Canadians to play a critical role in healing the divisions that rack the nation.

THE ECONOMY

The magnitude of the problem is undeniable. After 14 months of recession, more than 1.4 million Canadians are without work. Thousands of shoppers go to the United States each week to buy cheaper goods. Many corporations are also relocating there. Both groups blame Canada's high taxes, which governments in turn blame on their persistent budget deficits and on the need to fund social programs. The Canadian enterprises that remain struggle to adjust to the new realities of global competition and free trade—possibly soon to include Mexico.

For its part, the Conservative federal government has relied largely on market forces to restore the economy's vigor. But it quickly became clear that the *Maclean's* forum did not share the government's free-market convictions. Instead, the 12 Canadians urged the Prime Minister to convene a meeting of leaders in business, science and economics, and to draft with them "a co-ordinated, cohesive national industrial policy." Free trade may have expanded the playing field, the participants acknowledged, but it has not lessened—and may even have increased—

the need for a skilled quarterback to bring some order to the national economic game.

At first glance, that interventionist prescription runs counter to many of the conservative trends of the past decade. Commented John Bulloch, president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB): "The idea that you can direct economies from the centre is dead." At the same time, the participants backed away from another conservative economic tenet—the pursuit of balanced public budgets—urging governments instead to budget "responsibly."

In fact, the Briars group avoided proposing that the federal government direct the nation's economy in detail from Ottawa. Said Karen Adams, a self-employed knitwear designer from Toronto: "I'm terrified of anything that government gets involved with." The forum's proposal, instead, would invoke the federal government only to implement a plan devised largely by business to make the best use of national resources in science, education, tax policy and finance.

Still, their vision is ambitious. Its centrepiece is a committee, convened by the office of the prime minister, that would bring together representatives from the Canadian Manufacturers' Association and—despite Bulloch's skepticism—the CFIB, as well as presidents of major Canadian companies, the head of the National Research Council Canada and an array of international consultants. The committee would be given six months within which "to identify Canadian competitive strengths and propose methods to take advantage of them." Acknowledging the source of much of its inspiration, the forum added: "The policy will be modelled to some extent after the one in Japan, and may include a ministry of international trade and industry [MITI]"—the architect of that country's decennial economic "vision" statements.

Among the ideas that the *Maclean's* forum proposed for consideration by the national committee are several familiar ones: the reduction of interprovincial trade barriers; closer co-ordination among business, universities and governments over retraining programs; and financial incentives for research and development in "strategic" industries.

Others were new. Among them: mandating the National Research Council to co-ordinate research in publicly funded laboratories and relocating the federal fisheries and agriculture departments closer to the people who are regulated. Still other suggestions have proven successful in some parts of the country and appear to merit wider application. Prominent among those is a proposal—modelled on Quebec's highly successful Caisse de depot et placement, which oversees \$36 billion in provincial pension and automobile insurance funds—to encourage other Canadian pension and insurance funds to invest in new businesses.

Some critics expressed doubt that an approach based on successful models in the comparatively homogeneous corporate cultures of Japan and French-speaking Quebec can easily be transplanted to the Canadian economy as a whole. Commented the CFIB'S Bulloch: "In Japan, the elevator operators give you the same bloody line as the head of Mm. In English Canada, we are so individualistic it wouldn't work."

Other experts firmly supported the forum's recommendations. Said Nancy Riche, executive vice-president of the Canadian Labour Congress: "Since 1984, we've had a market economy based on a Conservative agenda. It hasn't worked." By contrast, Riche says that the direction proposed by the *Maclean's* forum has promise—as long as representa-



Alleyne (left), Pratt: agreement that Canadians do not know their own country

lives of organized labor join business leaders in drawing up the proposed national plan. "With the right players," she said, "we may be able to do something." Noting the forum's emphasis on competitiveness, the Business Council on National Issues' d'Aquino also said that its conclusions offer an opportunity to rally the country around clear economic goals. "The ideas are there," he said. "What is missing is the consensus—and action." Added d'Aquino: "I take off my hat to these guys. You get people together and you discover a tremendous amount of common sense."

In fact, some of the group's proposals are already in place. In January, the federal government announced the creation of a Labor Force Development Board, with 22 members—16 of them representing business and labor. It began work in May to improve national training programs. Ottawa has also announced its intent to eliminate provincial trade barriers.

Despite those beginnings, however, the 12 Canadians who signed the Briars document are clearly not alone in their conviction that the economy is out of control. Said Thomas Kierans, president of Toronto's C. D. Howe Institute, a nonprofit policy research foundation funded largely by business: "People believe the Mulroney government has given up resisting market forces, and they are being cast to the wolves." That concern was clearly reflected in the Briars proposals.

THE CONSTITUTION

Just before 10 p.m. on the first night of the weekend, Ontario's Collings touched the raw heart of the issue for many Canadians. "No one is listening to us," she said. "Decisions are made before we are aware of the problem. What leadership there is, I just feel that they are laughing at us." The indictment of Canadian federalism was so damning that it might easily have been dismissed as extreme—if it were not evident that many other Canadians share Collings's view.

The language was less charged 43 hours later, when, late on Sunday afternoon, the 12 participants in the *Maclean's* forum signed the final document outlining their recommendations for a renewed nation. But the striking loss of faith in the present government's willingness or

ability to represent the people was the same. "The current system," that document states, "does not afford some peoples, regions, provinces and communities within Canada the tools needed to adequately promote their interests. . . . The government, as currently structured, is not sufficiently representative."

The forum's sharply focused proposals for reform would radically alter that structure. The power of political parties would diminish dramatically, with a corresponding expansion of the role of royal commissions in policy-making. Native Canadians would be assured of representation in the Commons—and in any other forum where matters that concerned them were discussed. And governments would be obliged to pay far closer attention to changes in public opinion.

At the same time, most of those reforms could be accomplished without the need to amend the Constitution. Indeed, the most critical proposals require little more than amendments to the Canada Elections Act—changes that Parliament can effect alone. Some, in fact, require no change in legislation at all—only a departure from the traditions of parliamentary practice.

At the heart of the forum's proposals are three related recommendations that would force elected members to become far more responsive, and less "representative," in the classical sense associated with British tradition. Those changes include fixed terms for members of Parliament and senators (an elected upper house was one of the few suggested reforms that would require a constitutional amendment); staggered elections, in which only a portion of the two chambers would face re-election at one time; and free voting by MPs, independent of party discipline. "MPs would not be bound to vote with the government," said Richard Miller, a British Columbia Crown prosecutor. At the same time, he added, "If legislation did not pass, the government would not have to resign."

Meanwhile, staggered elections, held as frequently as every two years for a portion of seats in the Commons, would "keep the party in power on their toes," argued Charles Dupuis, a litigation lawyer from Montreal. Declared Dupuis: "They would know in advance that the majority they have now could be wiped out in two years."

The goal of a more responsible government in a form that bears strong echoes of the American system may have wide appeal for many Canadians. But one of Canada's leading constitutional experts, University of Toronto political scientist Richard Simeon, noted that several of the proposed reforms require close scrutiny. Staggered elections, for one, would allow Canadians "to vote every two years," he acknowledged, "but they only vote for one-third of the House. You couldn't turf the government out in the same way." And Simeon questioned the merits of reform modelled on the United States. There, he said, "the cohesion of the party has practically disappeared." As a result, "Congress is exceptionally responsive, but it can also be almost paralysed."

Canadians will see two sets of electoral reform proposals emerge this fall, both aimed at restoring the public's shattered confidence in the political process. But it is unlikely that either will reflect the direction proposed at the Briars. The federal Royal Commission on Electoral Reform will produce one set of new proposals. Its mandate is to find ways to "strengthen the democratic rights of citizens [and] encourage effective representation." Although some Canadians made proposals similar to those advanced by the *Maclean's* forum during public hearings before the royal commission earlier this year, commissioner Pierre Fortier said

that they will not be "a significant part of whatever thrust our report will take." Instead, he said, the commission will concentrate on proposals designed to make political parties more open to new ideas from the public.

Federal Conservative House Leader Harvie Andre has also pledged to deliver recommendations this fall designed to restore MPs' credibility with voters. But, although free votes are among the proposals he is considering, Andre also made it clear during an interview with *Maclean's* that he favors strengthening the position of political parties rather than weakening them. Declared Andre: "Political parties are virtually the only institutions in the country that have an interest in trying to reach a consensus."

The *Maclean's* forum would change that perception as well. In a strikingly original proposal, the 12 men and women urged that the venerable Canadian institution of the royal commission be given a new

importance as the pre-eminent mechanism for citizens to contribute to the creation of national policy. To that end, the participants at the forum recommended that "the commission system [be] reformed so that the result of the commission's inquiry shall be turned into draft legislation to be put before the legislative bodies for debate and vote." As Montreal's Dupuis explained it, "These royal commissions, they take a few months, then the report goes onto the shelf. We should force the government to hold a vote on the report." He added: "If you don't want to use it, at least the one who is going to decide is the person I voted for."

The participants were all obviously eager to assure a greater role in the political process for native Canadians. They called for "guaranteed representation for the First Nations of Canada" in both the Commons and the Senate, as well as "in federal forums discussing issues or dealing with policy affecting the First Nations"—including any future negotiations between Ottawa and the provinces over constitutional reform. The forum members also recommended giving the First Nations a voice alongside the provinces in negotiations with Ottawa over the future of national social programs. That development, said the Yukon's Geddes, might lead quickly to the disappearance of the federal department of Indian affairs. Added Geddes, a member of the Tlingit nation: "We don't want everything always

imposed on us. We want the ability to determine what our social issues are and what the solutions are."

At the same time, Geddes, whose films document the achievements as well as the adversities of Canada's natives, made an emotional plea for understanding that the First Nations are not intent on leaving Confederation. "In fact," she said, "what the elders are saying is that we have something to give to Canada—and we would like to be able to share that."

Geddes's words captured the spirit that, often elusively, permeated the dramatic weekend at the Briars. It is a sense that may also underlie the surface anger of many Canadians who say that they have been shut out of the central institutions of their own country. Beneath their simmering frustration resides a more positive emotion: a deep desire to contribute to the reinvention of Canada as a single nation. The same hopeful emotion is manifest in the conclusions of the 12 remarkable Canadians who forged the Briars consensus.



Collings: a focus on the young

CHRIS WOOD with
E. KAYE FULTON in Ottawa