

The Voices Of A Nation

How Decima assembled the tribes of thought



In the discordant chorus of ideas across Canada, their 12 voices expressed themselves with deliberately uneven harmony. From committed federalists through moderates and compromise seekers to Quebec separatists, the dozen Canadians brought together by *Maclean's* to

see if—stripped of their natural biases and conditioning—they could develop a consensus view of one Canada were initially united only by the depth of their different convictions. The participants in the *Maclean's* project were chosen by means of an extensive system of "cluster analysis" developed by Decima Research, *Maclean's* regular polling firm, headed by Allan Gregg. Its aim, said Decima vice-president Catherine Murray, "was to go much deeper than regular polls on national unity, and to understand the reasons behind polling figures and trends."

Maclean's asked Gregg and Murray to identify scientifically the clusters of thinking in the country that, taken together, constitute a portrait of the main patterns of thought that dominate the nation. Then, by carefully selecting individuals whose views matched the characteristics of each cluster, Murray and her team would create a panel that represented the collective thought patterns of the nation. Said Murray: "We also wanted to get beyond the conventional viewpoints from interest groups and politicians to have Canadians speak for themselves."

The project arose after the collapse a year ago of the Meech Lake constitutional accord, when *Maclean's* began searching for a new, in-depth way to examine the views of representative Canadians. To form a group that would reflect that broad range of opinions, Decima began by looking at its recent political samplings, including the seventh annual *Maclean's*/Decima poll, published in January. It and another survey, which also involved 1,500 Canadians and was released at about the same time, focused on identifying the values, attitudes and beliefs that predominate on the national political scene. Then, Decima checked those responses against results from its monthly polling on national issues over the past year.

After a lengthy analysis of those results, Murray and Ottawa-based Decima consultant Justin Lewis were able to identify what they described as the six most widespread schools of political thought in Canada—three in Quebec, and three in the rest of the country. Murray said that the current gulf in political thinking between Quebec and the rest of the country is so deep that Decima finally decided to treat Canada,

for the purpose of the selection, as "two countries."

With that, Decima staff made more than 400 additional calls across the country to find people whose opinions most clearly reflected the six clusters. Decima and *Maclean's* then selected a shortlist of 35 possible participants from coast to coast, and *Maclean's* editors and reporters re-interviewed them all to determine who were the most articulate in expressing their views. The final choice of 11 was also influenced by the need to balance the various regions of Canada, differing ages, both sexes and the relative prominence of the specific points of view.

There was one exception to that selection process. *Maclean's* editors and Decima agreed that the forum should have a native Canadian participant, but standard telephone polling methods do not produce a representative sam-

pling of the native population. As a result, *Maclean's* mounted its own search for an articulate spokesman for native issues, one with no current affiliation with specific native political organizations. The choice: Yukon Indian film-maker and writer Carol Geddes.

Of the other 11 participants, many occasionally expressed views that set them apart from the clusters that Decima placed them in. And, said Murray, some of the participants may even object to the descriptions that Decima attached to them. Still, she declared with pleasure at the end of the weekend, "they were consistent and articulate representatives of the respective patterns of thought that they were chosen to



BRIAN WILDER/MACLEANS

Murray: testimony to divisions that scar the country

represent." The positions they took in the discussions confirmed the validity of the process, she added.

Outside Quebec, there are three main clusters of thought, which *Maclean's* and Decima chose to label as Firm Federalists (33 per cent of the adult population), Peacemakers (27 per cent) and Fed-up Federalists (40 per cent). Within Quebec, there are also three main clusters: Quebec Federalists (44 per cent), Hard Separatists (32 per cent) and Moderates (24 per cent).

The main characteristics of each group:

Firm Federalists: People in this category are very proud to call themselves Canadian. They say that there is a shared Canadian identity and that Canada can play a significant role in shaping world events. As well, they say that the federal system has treated them well, and that the interests of their respective provinces are adequately served within the current system. Firm Federalists also say that they are happy with the status quo in federal power sharing, but unhappy with the problems that they see throughout the country. They have not decided if Quebec will separate, and they say that they are uncertain what will happen if it does. They also have not made up their minds about whether all provinces should have equal representation in Ottawa, but generally they say that they favor a slightly stronger federal government. The participants who fit that overall description were Karen Adams, Colin Finn and Richard Miller.

Peacemakers: Canadians who fall under the broad umbrella of Peacemakers say that there is a very strong likelihood that Quebec will separate—and that such an event would produce high economic costs and radical changes in their personal lives. To avoid that, they say that they favor meeting Quebec's demands by shifting more power to all provinces. They also place a high value on consultation, support a national bilingualism policy and are generally receptive to Quebec's claims to special status. Despite their willingness to give more power to the provinces and uphold provincial values, they favor strong national standards for certain economic and social policy issues.

Peacemakers say that it is important to protect the less fortunate in society and, as a result, they place a high value on continued equalization payments to the provinces.

The two participants who fell into this category are Karren Collings and John Prall.

Fed-up Federalists: Like some Quebecers, these Canadians say that their province has been unfairly treated in the federal system, and they claim that they are not well represented in Parliament. But unlike their francophone Quebec counterparts, they say that they believe in a common Canadian identity. They also support a more influential voice for smaller provinces in the federal government. And they favor a more decentralized form of federalism. People in the category may say either that national tensions are a normal condition or that they are unusually high at present.

Although those who lean towards the Fed-up Federalist position—

rather than embracing it wholeheartedly—say that Canadian federalism is already decentralized almost as much as it should be, they also argue for more provincial control in certain areas. Still, in a referendum they would probably vote for the status quo.

The participants who fit the general description of the group were Viola Cerezke-Schooler and Sheila Simpson. Decima determined that Geddes also belonged to that category.

Quebec Federalists: This group is generally more assertive than its counterpart in the rest of the country. Those who fall into the category reject the vision of two linguistic solitudes. They identify strongly with other regions of Canada, and they say that the country is far more than the sum of its parts. Federalists in Quebec differ from Firm Federalists in a critical area: although they favor maintaining the status quo, they would likely favor greater provincial power in a referendum. Within the umbrella group, there is a subgroup whose members are alienated enough within Canada to question the existence of a common Canadian identity. And all members of the larger category say that they have been left out of the current debate and feel powerless to affect it.

The participant who represented the group is Robert Lalande.

Hard Separatists: Members of this cluster are highly pessimistic about finding any single solution to Canada's problems. They favor a sovereign Quebec and they assume that francophones and anglophones have nothing in common. They also reject claims that Canada has a clear national identity. And they say that historical grievances and the unfair treatment of Quebec within Canada justify the province's right to be considered a distinct society.

Hard Separatists in general favor provincial control of virtually all policy fields, in some cases including currency. Most want full independence for Quebec and a common-market arrangement with the rest of Canada.

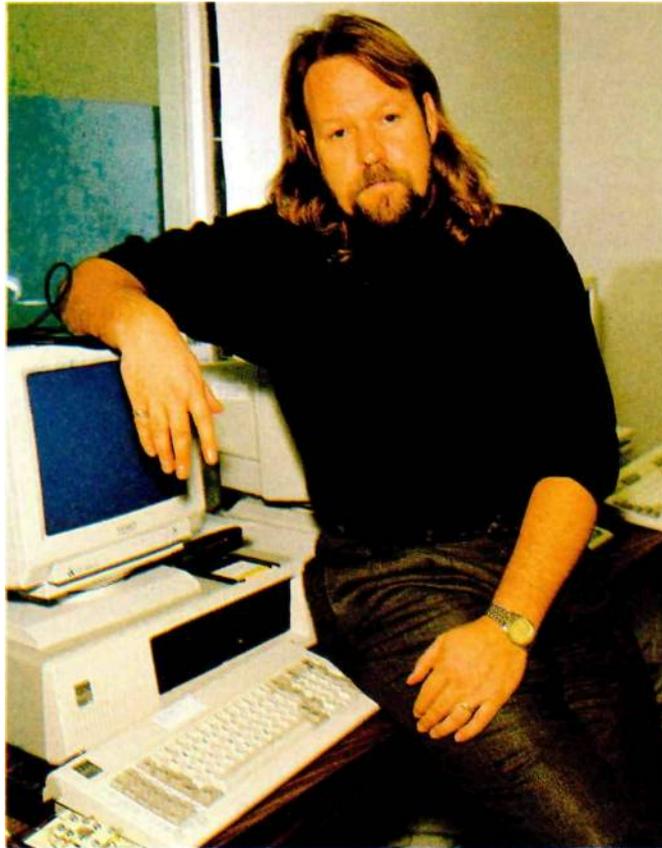
Charles Dupuis and Marie Le-Beau were the participants who represented this category.

Quebec Moderates: Moderates are prepared to accept the existence of a common Canadian

identity, and reject claims that Canada is a nation of two solitudes. They agree with their Hard Separatist counterparts on some issues, but the Moderates do not insist on any special status for Quebec. Members of this group say that every province should have equal power—regardless of population—in a common-market arrangement. They generally favor continued equalization payments from the federal government to the provinces, a common currency system and the protection of national standards in some social policy fields.

Cyril Alleyne was the participant who reflected this cluster.

Taken together, the participants in the *Maclean's*/Decima group hold views and positions that represent an accurate picture of the nation's thinking, said Murray. Their weekend discussions were an eloquent testimony to the deep divisions that scar the country—and a beacon of hope for the future.



BRIAN WILLIAMS/MACLEANS'S

Gregg: the meetings were a beacon of hope for the future