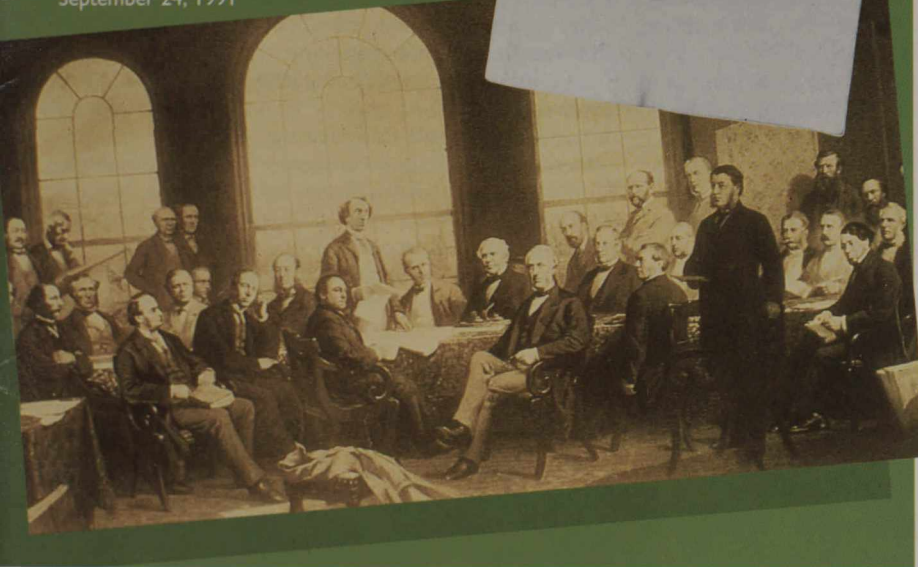
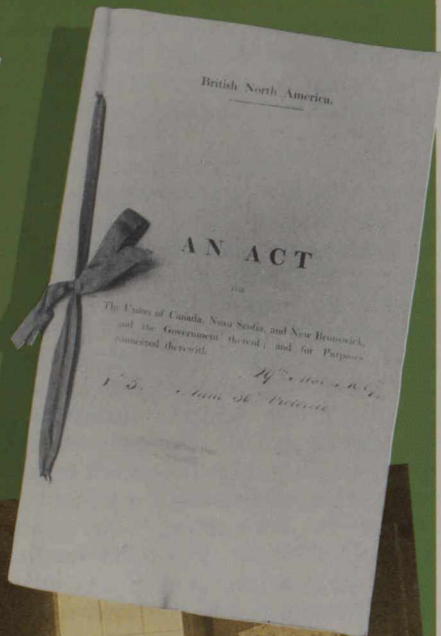


Shaping Canada's Future

These changes add up to a renewal, now long overdue, of our Confederation. And renewal is what Canadians everywhere seek for our country — not confrontation, not division, not rupture.

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney
September 24, 1991



The British North America Act and the 'Fathers of Confederation' meeting in 1867

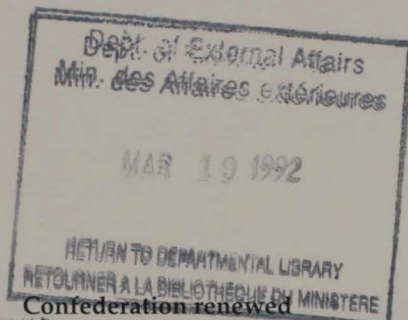
Canadians are in the midst of a period of intense reflection and debate about their country's future.

The focus of their debate is Canada's fundamental law, its Constitution, and the challenge is to redefine what is essentially a 19th-century document to make it better suited to the challenges of the 21st century.

After more than a year of study and consultation, the federal government issued in September a series of proposals for constitutional reform. The proposals attempt to resolve some long-standing issues: Quebec's place in the federation, native rights, westerners' desire for a stronger voice, and the distribution of powers between the federal and provincial governments. Because national unity and prosperity are intertwined, the plan also contains measures to strengthen the economic union, streamline government services and make Canada more competitive.

The debate is not over: release of the proposals was the first step in a five-month process of consultation with the provinces and the public, which is now nearing completion.

Photos: Canapress Photo Service /
National Archives of Canada C-7299



On September 24th Prime Minister Mulroney unveiled 28 proposals for fundamental constitutional reform.

The plan would, Mr. Mulroney told the House of Commons, build a stronger and more prosperous Canada where all Canadians can feel at home. It would recognise Quebec as a distinct society within the Canadian federation, establish native self-government, redistribute powers between the federal and provincial governments, provide for an elected Senate and a more effective House of Commons and strengthen the economic union.

The core of Canada's Constitution is the British North America Act of 1867 (now called the Constitution Act of 1867), which joined the provinces of Quebec, Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in Confederation. Changes to the act required the consent of the British Parliament until the Constitution was patriated in 1982. At that time, the federal government and nine of the ten provincial premiers agreed to add a Charter of Rights and Freedoms and an amending formula. Quebec objected to both the amending formula and the Charter and refused to sign. It was still bound by the new provisions, however.

In 1987, Prime Minister Mulroney and all 10 premiers agreed on a package of constitutional amendments, known as the Meech Lake Accord, which was designed to bring Quebec back into the constitutional fold. When the Accord lapsed in June 1990 after two provinces failed to ratify it within the three-year deadline, the federal government began to pursue other avenues of constitutional reform. An 18-member Cabinet committee chaired by Joe Clark, Minister for Constitutional Affairs, was formed to consider how to tackle constitutional reform. As a result of the committee's efforts, the government launched its proposals for reform in September.

The federal government and Parliament will use the plan to lead the constitutional debate, but the proposals are neither fixed nor final. The Prime Minister told the House of Commons that the government was submitting them for discussion and debate and would be open-minded 'to constructive amendments offered in the spirit of improving the proposals and broadening the consensus that Canadian unity needs and demands.'

A special all-party joint committee made up of 20 members of the House of Commons and 10 Senators and led by Quebec Senator Gerald Beaudoin and Manitoba MP Dorothy Dobbie was established to determine what improvements should be made to the plan. The federal government will also hold a series of conferences on the plan's major components. On the basis of input from the joint parliamentary committee, the public and the conferences, the government will then draft its policy on constitutional reform.

The objectives of the federal plan are to provide for greater prosperity, recognise Quebec's distinctive character, streamline government to serve Canadians better, recognise aboriginal rights and reform governmental institutions such as the