

Federal and provincial reaction to the May 20 Quebec referendum

Federal Opposition leader Joe Clark said that the defeat of the "yes" option was a vote for constitutional change. "Even some of the 'yes' votes were for renewed federalism," he said. "The initiative is now very squarely with the Federal Government.... For our part, we support the convening of a first ministers' conference now. My feeling about Premier Lévesque's response to the defeat was that the Parti Québécois will take immediate advantage of any faltering on the part of the Federal Government on this issue."

Federal New Democratic Party leader Edward Broadbent said he was "absolutely delighted with the outcome of the referendum but added it was clear the vote called for a change in the *status quo*. He said talks on constitutional change should begin this summer and should include the federal and provincial party leaders, not just provincial premiers.

Ontario Premier William Davis issued a strong plea for immediate constitutional talks saying the referendum "does not mark the end of a problem but rather the beginning of a solution". "Although Quebecers have made a welcome decision to deny the Parti Québécois government a mandate to negotiate sovereignty-association, this is based on the conviction that the rest of Canada does not support the *status quo*. ...Now that the momentum for change has been affirmed in Quebec, we must throughout Canada carry the constitutional reform to a successful conclusion."

Alberta Premier Peter Lougheed summed up western political reaction when he said he was pleased that Quebec had rejected sovereignty-association. The premier emphasized that the referendum results represented not only a vote for renewed federalism, but an overwhelming vote for change within the framework of a Canadian state. "The matter is now in the Federal court," he said.

British Columbia Premier Bill Bennett said "the Canadian problem will be the ability of the ten provincial governments and the Government of Canada to sit down and resolve not only those concerns that led Quebec to a referendum but also the concerns of the other parts of the country that have been so eloquently expressed by their premiers. It's going to be a difficult task but a task that is not insurmountable...it's time now for the Government to get on with the job," he added.

Saskatchewan Premier Allan Blakeney called for an immediate first ministers' meeting to discuss constitutional change. "I adopt the view that what Quebec has done is to give federalism another chance. We must therefore be able to show that federalism can respond in a short number of years," he said.

Manitoba Premier Sterling Lyon said he was very happy that Quebec had voted "no" to sovereignty-association but indicated that Quebec should not expect special privileges. He said he thought that the constitution could be amended within two years following a series of federal-provincial conferences.

Newfoundland Premier Brian Peckford said the results present "a golden opportunity to rewrite a new constitution. If we lose this opportunity within the next few months we're back to the same old situation".

New Brunswick Premier Richard Hatfield said that one lesson that could be taken from the referendum is that "independence is not open to anyone because the Canadian people will not let politicians destroy the country. We must work with maturity to resolve the country's problem".

Premier Angus MacLean of Prince Edward Island said "there will still be problems in the country regardless of what constitutional changes are made. No matter how extensive the amendments will be, there will be parts of the country that won't be happy, and we'll have to work to change that".

Premier John Buchanan of Nova Scotia said the referendum results were a vote of confidence in Canada, and now it is time for the provinces to pursue a renewed federalism. "It's very important that a large majority in Quebec has voted this kind of confidence in Canada," he said.

all Canadians, to seek together for methods and mechanisms more effective than those used until now and to be willing to make every effort required to achieve success. For that purpose, I have asked the Minister of Justice to begin immediately a tour of the provincial capitals in order to obtain the views of the premiers on the best way to follow up on their will to change. As for us, our only pre-requisites for change are the two which I outlined in Quebec as early as January 1977.

"First, that Canada continue to be a real federation, a state whose constitution establishes a federal Parliament with real powers applying to the country as a whole and provincial legislatures with powers just as real applying to the territory of each province. Second, that a charter of fundamental rights and freedoms be entrenched in the new constitution and that it extend to the collective aspect of these rights, such as language rights.

"...What we want is to give Canada a new, modern and functional federal constitution which will enable our governments to better meet the needs and aspirations of all Canadians. This new constitution could include, if the people so wish, several provisions in our present organic laws, but, it will also have to contain new elements reflecting the most innovative proposals emerging from our consultations or from the numerous analyses and considered opinions that have flowed in the last few years from the will to change of Canadians.

"...I will be able to consult with the leaders of other parties in Parliament, to communicate with all premiers and advise as to the best means of achieving the renewal of the constitution. As for now, all I can say with certainty is that my government is deeply convinced that the constitutional renewal process must be undertaken promptly...."

Prime Minister Trudeau, in his speech, also announced that Justice Minister Jean Chrétien would begin immediately a cross-Canada tour to speak to every provincial premier about a time-table and agenda for constitutional reform. "We have to act fast now. We'll discuss the whole process," said Mr. Chrétien. "We have some ideas and the premiers have ideas. It's fine to make speeches, but now we have to move to fulfil the strong desire of Canadians for constitutional change," he said.