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Federal government and provinces come to consensus on Constitution

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and nine of ten provincial premiers have agreed on a compromise that would give Canada its own independent Constitution after 114 years of nationhood.

The measure, which was opposed by Quebec, was the result of a federal-provincial constitutional conference, held in Ottawa, November 1-5. The talks came about following the controversial Supreme Court decision on the Canadian Constitution handed down in September (see *Canada Weekly*, October 14, 1981).

The federal-provincial agreement means that the federal government's agreed upon constitutional resolution, introduced last February, amended in April and awaiting a final two-day debate in Parliament, meets both requirements set by the Supreme Court in its historic judgement: it is legal and it honours constitutional traditions, because it has a high degree of provincial consensus.

The changes to the resolution agreed to by the provinces was introduced in the House of Commons on November 5 and the constitutional resolution now requires

unanimous consent of the House of Commons before it can be sent to the British Parliament for consideration. Should the agreement be passed in the Canadian House of Commons, it seems likely that the resolution would be passed by the British Parliament, returning to Canada the cornerstone of the Canadian Constitution, the British North America Act of 1867. The exact wording of the revised resolution is being discussed and no decision has yet been taken on its definitive format.

In the House of Commons, Conservative Party leader Joe Clark responded to the agreement by saying he wanted to examine the detailed language of the pact before seeking his party's approval. New Democratic Party members of Parliament, under leader Edward Broadbent, have generally endorsed the principles of the accord.

In the end, the agreement was a modified form of the amending formula espoused by the eight provinces and that had been sent to the Supreme Court in their opposition to the original constitu-



Prime Minister Trudeau addresses conference. (From left to right): Ontario Premier William Davis, federal Justice Minister Jean Chrétien, Mr. Trudeau, federal Finance Minister Allan MacEachen and Quebec Premier René Lévesque.

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