

Your Opinion

Canadians face difficult choice whether vote yes or no Oct. 26

I have decided to vote in the October 26 National Referendum. But whether I will vote "yes" or "no" to the question: "Do you agree that the Constitution should be renewed on the basis of the agreement reached on August 28, 1992?" is another matter. I am definitely "undecided." I know I am not alone, so I have decided to lay out a series of columns about the so-called "Charlottetown Consensus"—part of my own process of figuring out how to vote on October 26. If you want to participate in this discussion, you can write to me c/o NORTHERN INSIGHTS, 72 Jean Street, Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7A 5E9, or fax me at (807) 343-0446. If you're making up your mind like I am, you should take the time to read the actual text. A free copy can be had at any MP's office, or by calling the federal government's toll free number, 1-800-561-1188.



**NORTHERN
INSIGHTS**

by Larry Sanders



to Northern Ontario in either the new Senate or the expanded House of Commons.

• no "poetry" about what we really want to strive to become, as a nation. If the legal document that will eventually emerge from this consensus report is anything like what we now see, it will be dull prose, not a true reflection of the Canadian spirit.

I will get into these points in greater detail in later columns. First, I want to think out loud about the political consequences of saying "yes" or "no." After all, the choice we're making on October 26 is a very political one, just like casting a vote in a regular election.

I reject out of hand the suggestion by Preston Manning, the leader of the Reform Party, who wants us to vote "no" and then implement a five-year moratorium on constitutional discussions. However the vote goes, we seem destined for more talks and negotiations.

If the majority of Canadians in all provinces and territories vote "yes," we will then witness the federal and provincial legislatures go through a ratification process of the actual text of the amendments. Joe Clark has made it clear that it's unlikely we will see that legal text BEFORE October 26, so we have to cast our vote on the basis of the *Charlottetown Consensus*. Everyone admits that this document contains flaws and inconsistencies, since it was a compromise. As a result, lawyers, legislators and interest groups will have their work cut out for them to hammer out the actual deal. That might sound intimidating to those who would just as soon see the entire mess tabled forever, but it does say something about Canada: we're still going to be building ourselves for years to come.

If the majority of Canadians vote "no" on October 26, Quebec will no doubt be forced into a provincial election. There may have to be elections in Alberta and Manitoba as well. After the dust from those votes have settled, we will then have a federal election sometime next year. Whoever is elected will have to deal with what's left of the country—economically and constitutionally speaking. One can only hope that Iain Angus, the MP for Thunder Bay—Atikokan, is right when he said at the founding meeting of his "vote yes" committee September 20 that a no vote "is not unpatriotic. It will just mean Canadians don't like this deal." If views like his prevail, there may be political will to try to work out something better than the *Charlottetown Consensus*.

Thus, I can't make up my mind whether to vote "yes" or "no" simply on the basis of the overall politics of this situation. We're going into more negotiations after October 26, regardless of the outcome. So we have to look at the actual *Charlottetown Consensus* to decide whether that's a good foundation for what's ahead. I begin that process next week.

There are still more sides to the delinquent father's story

Dear Editor:

This is in response to Larry Sanders column re: *There's another side to the delinquent father's story*.

This is an excerpt from a pamphlet outlining Automatic Wage Deduction "a new way to pay child support" set out by the Ministry of the Attorney General. It came into effect March 1, 1992.

Failure to pay family support is a massive social problem that affects everyone. In Ontario today, over \$460 million in support payments have not been made. Almost 75 per cent of all family support orders filed with the Family Support Plan are in default. Without regular support payments many parents with custody of children—most of them women—experience financial and emotional hardship.

Many children are not getting the nutritious meals, warm clothes, and adequate housing that they require. Some families that do not receive regular support payments end up on social assistance, which costs all taxpayers.

It is not just as easy as "phoning a toll-free number, complaining and a garnishee kicks in." I have been dealing with a similar situation for 13 years.

The custodial parent has to apply to the courts for custody of the children, support for these children and any division of marital possessions. This requires a lawyer whose costs are paid by the custodial parent. The court can determine the amount of monthly support payments which will depend on the financial picture of both the custodial and non-custodial parent.

The non-custodial parent is kept well-informed by the court and has to sign any legal papers that sets down the support payment, visitation rights and the division of any marital possessions. This sending of legal papers back and forth (especially if the two parties live in separate towns or provinces) can take a lot of time, even years.

The court is quite lenient in allowing the non-custodial parent plenty of time to pay child support voluntarily. Child support is not retro-active—it only goes into effect after all legal work is done.

It is only after child support payments are not being paid is it turned over to the Support and Custody Enforcement Agency. This Agency would contact the defaulter several times to set up arrangements to pay child support. After all avenues are exhausted they would put in motion a garnishee against the defaulter.

Yes! The support and Custody Enforcement Agency can garnishee the non-custodial parent up to 50 per cent of their gross earnings, whether it is wages, sick leave, L.T.D. or U.I.C., etc. This is only in effect until all arrears are paid and then the defaulter goes back to paying his regular monthly support payments. Remember, if you aren't in arrears—you won't be garnisheed!

If anyone would like more information about the Family Support Plan please write to the:

Communications Branch of the Ministry of the Attorney General, 720 Bay St., 3rd Floor, Toronto, Ont., M5G 2K1.

Sharon Lanktree
single parent of four

Federal politicians like Joe Clark and Ovide Mercredi are encouraging us to look at the deal as a whole, and recognize that it's most important characteristic is that it is a COMPROMISE. So I started by reading the whole text, as vague as it is in most places. I encourage everyone to try to do the same thing.

For me, the highlights of what IS in this "consensus" are:

- an expanded Canada Clause for the Constitution spelling out some of the principles by which we call ourselves "Canadian."
- constitutional recognition of the inherent right of aboriginal peoples to self-government as one of the "three orders of government" in Canada.
- creation of an elected Senate with six Senators for each province plus one Senator for each territory, plus an undetermined number of aboriginal senators.
- immediate expansion of the House of Commons to 337 seats, adding more seats for Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta; further redistribution of seats following the 1996 census including a permanent en-trenchment in the constitution that Quebec should never have less than 25 per cent of the seats.
- redistributing powers between Ottawa and the provinces, giving the provincial governments exclusive jurisdiction over more areas; reducing the federal role in other areas by making them subject to federal-provincial agreements.

The things that are NOT in the consensus document that seem important to me are:

- formal recognition of municipalities as a "fourth order" of government in Canada.
- clearer definition of the role of the new Senate.
- no formal or legally binding agreement by Ontario to give proper political representation

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