

# Beaudoin-Dobbie Committee

One of the recommendations of the Beaudoin-Edwards Committee on the process of constitutional amendment was that a joint committee be appointed to examine the substance of any proposed constitutional changes. In the Throne Speech opening Parliament in May 1991, the federal government announced the development of a set of proposals and the creation of a committee to consult with Canadians about the proposals. This committee of Senators and Members of Parliament contained representation from the three major federal political parties and was chaired by Senator Gerald Beaudoin and MP Dorothy Dobbie. The proposals for constitutional change that the Committee would be consulting with Canadians about were contained in a government document, *Shaping Canada's Future Together: Proposals*. The proposals for change were sweeping and went to the heart of the structure of the Canadian federation. Among other issues, the proposals dealt with Canadian identity, Quebec as a distinct society, Aboriginal peoples, senate reform, economic union among the provinces and the distribution of powers between the federal and provincial governments.

Five months into its mandate, in November 1991, the Committee was encountering difficulty.

With internal tensions, logistical problems and apparent apathy among Canadians to the Committee's work. With these difficulties in mind, the federal government participated in the organization of five three-day conferences across the country, with each conference considering a different aspect of constitutional reform and with the members of the 'Beaudoin-Dobbie Committee' participating at each conference.

Ultimately the 'Beaudoin-Dobbie Committee' received over 3,000 written submissions and heard from over 700 witnesses. The report of the Committee, entitled *A Renewed Canada*, recommended changes to every aspect of the initial federal proposals. To the clause recognizing Quebec as a distinct society the Committee added a reference to the importance of minority language communities, English and French, throughout Canada. To the proposal to create an elected Senate, the Committee added a recommendation that a reformed Senate represent regional, gender and social diversity in its composition. Lastly, to the proposal aimed at strengthening the Canadian economic union, the Committee recommended adding a social charter to promote social well-being and equitable distribution of wealth. The Committee's recommendations also differed from the initial proposals with respect to the Supreme Court of Canada, division of powers between the federal and provincial governments and on the formula for amending (see amending formula) the Constitution. The Committee's recommendations then served as the basis for discussion in the Charlottetown round of constitutional reform. However, with the ultimate rejection of the Charlottetown Accord, the recommendations of the 'Beaudoin-Dobbie Committee' have not been formally implemented.

Sources:

- Government of Canada, Special Joint Committee on a Renewed Canada, *Report of the Special Joint Committee on a Renewed Canada* (Ottawa: Supply and Services, 1992).
- Government of Canada, *Shaping Canada's Future Together: Proposals* (Ottawa: Supply and Services, 1991).
- P.H. Russell, *Constitutional Odyssey: Can Canadians Become a Sovereign People?*, 2d ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).