

WHAT'S REALLY AT STAKE IN THE PC LEADERSHIP RACE?

by Kenneth McRoberts

For the next few months, Canadian politics will be dominated by the Progressive Conservative leadership race. The contest promises to provide great publicity to the PCs, if they can overcome past habits and hang together through the process. Beyond that, the race will provide fine entertainment for the nation.

LEADERS AND THEIR PARTIES

However, do leadership races really make a difference? Do leaders take a party, and a government, in a different direction from the one it would have followed otherwise? Typically, they do not. In Canada, most successful leaders have simply reflected dominant forces within their party, carefully balancing off different factions while cultivating the party's established electoral base and funding sources. In these terms, Mackenzie King was of course the quintessential party leader—and was rewarded for this with a singularly long tenure in office. The recipe has worked no less well for Robert Bourassa, his modern incarnation.

One might even say as much of Mulroney's tenure. Over the last nine years, would government policies have been fundamentally different if the government had been in the hands of one of Mulroney's primary leadership opponents: Michael Wilson, John Crosbie—or even Joe Clark? The social and economic policies were precisely what one would have expected of a Tory government in the 1980s: downscaling the state, cutting back social spending, free trade. To be sure, Mulroney did put more energy than the others might have in trying to secure Quebec's place in the constitution. But, by and large, he stayed within the established approaches to the question—as would have the others.

LEADERS WITH AN AGENDA

Nonetheless, there have been occasions when leadership choice has had profound consequences, when a leader imposes a personal agenda, taking the party, and the country, in quite a new direction. One thinks of Margaret Thatcher's impact on the British Conservative party. One also thinks of Pierre Trudeau. Would the last 25 years of Canadian political life have been the same if Robert Winters, rather than Trudeau, had won the 1968 Liberal race?

Fixated on the Quebec question, Trudeau relentlessly pursued a whole set of policies designed to incorporate Quebec within Canada.

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Such measures as the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, whose real purpose was to entrench language rights so as to make Quebecers feel at home throughout Canada, have profoundly affected politics and society throughout Canada. In pursuing these policies, Trudeau was not simply responding to pressures from within his party. In fact, during his tenure in office, Trudeau virtually destroyed the Liberal party, as an organization. And through such nationalist economic policies as Petro-Canada and the national

energy program, he drove a deep wedge between the party and its base of corporate support.

In the upcoming Conservative leadership race, only Kim Campbell seems to offer the potential of change in the party's direction. The similarities with Trudeau have been widely remarked upon: freshness, independence, high intelligence, arrogance, a certain trendiness, etc. She might, indeed, have the capacity and inclination to pursue an agenda that differs somewhat from her party's. But does she in fact have such a personal agenda? Unlike the case with Trudeau, there is no body of writings to guide us. And if whatever agenda she does possess has not been carefully defined over many years, will she have the moral authority and personal determination to pursue it in the face of opposition within the party, and the country?

It is difficult to see even the potential of a major shift in policy with the other leading candidates. In the case of Perrin Beatty, Barbara McDougall, or Jean Charest (let alone Don Mazankowski), the idea that they might have a personal agenda of change, striking a new course from the Mulroney years, seems almost laughable.

Yet, if the stakes in a leadership race rarely extend to basic areas of policy, they clearly do entail the electoral fortunes of a party. Often, as in the present case, the very reason for the leadership change is to improve a party's dismal electoral prospects. Sometimes, it can work—even for a government party. In 1968, by replacing Lester Pearson with Pierre Trudeau, the Liberals were able to go from minority government to majority government.

Nonetheless, even if leadership can affect the likelihood that one party rather than another wins control of the government, how significant is that, in the last analysis?

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Some political scientists would argue that government policies are not determined by whatever party occupies power. The basic forces that shape policy lie elsewhere than the set of politicians who form a government, whether in bureaucrats, social groups, the international economic order, or the basic "spirit of the times." Indeed, would federal policy be significantly different under the Liberal leadership of Jean

Chrétien? The present experience of the Bob Rae government in Ontario offers graphic evidence of the constraints that governments face. Even a party committed to a major restructuring of public policy may be led to forgo many of its objectives.

LEADERSHIP AND REGIONAL POLITICS

There is, however, one sense in which the leadership race clearly will have a major impact: how it affects Canada's deeply rooted regional politics. The PC's recently won and still fragile Quebec base could be endangered if the party chose a leader who appeared unsympathetic to Quebec's concerns. If this were to happen, and Jean Chrétien were to remain unpopular in Quebec, the Bloc québécois might, indeed, make a major breakthrough. Conversely, if the PCs were to pick a leader closely identified with Quebec and the Liberals were to keep Jean Chrétien as leader, then west-

ern Canadians surely would move to the Reform party (despite the party's present difficulties, which Roger Gibbins describes elsewhere).

A strong presence of the Bloc québécois, or the Reform party, in the House could have a major impact on the discourse of Canadian politics. We might even find that the Quebec question or Senate reform has been put back on the table by a government anxious to shore up its regional base.

In short, in the time-honoured tradition of Canadian politics, the significance of the present leadership race may lie less in the candidates' policy positions, let alone ideas, than in the parts of the country they come from — or can credibly claim to understand.

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REMEMBERING BRIAN MULRONEY

by H.W. Arthurs

The past decade has seen profound and probably lasting changes in Canada's political culture, economic life, and institutional structures. These changes were not all wrought by Brian Mulroney's Conservative government: the world economy, chronic regional alienation, and Pierre Trudeau all played their part. But many were. Brian Mulroney was an activist prime minister. He defined some major priorities, worked hard to accomplish them, and leaves his successors a landscape considerably reshaped by the successes and failures of his policies.

The irony is, however, that we will not remember Prime Minister Mulroney as an activist. He will be recalled as the man who chose to interpret public disillusionment with

federal politics as a mandate to permanently disempower the national government.

He pried Ottawa's hand from the levers of national economic policy

"... we will think it very odd that someone so patently driven by a desire to wield national political power could over 10 years of crises and opportunities think of nothing better to do with that power than to denigrate and permanently dismantle it."

by committing us, pretty much irrevocably, to free trade. He offered constitutional hostages to political fortune not once but twice, as he sought to permanently restore to the

provinces powers that had adhered to Ottawa largely by default. He deregulated and downsized government to encourage enterprise and fiscal responsibility. He disbanded research units and advisory bodies and marginalized the civil service, thus diminishing the intellectual capacity of the national government to shape public policy, and of the mainstream parties to negotiate a national political agenda.

Perhaps free trade was neither good nor bad, but merely inevitable. Perhaps all governments today must write public policy on recycled paper made from old printouts of currency traders and bond salesmen. Perhaps the attempted devolution of power and influence to the prov-