

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?

"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 ..."

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

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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-

inces was not an act of self-abnegation, but was decreed by a worldwide trend to regionalism or driven by generosity and patriotism. Perhaps public discontent with "Ottawa" — and with government more generally — was bound to throw up new parties of backlash and regional discontent, humble the federal mandarin, and reveal the precarious nature of our claim to be a liberal and compassionate society.

Perhaps, in other words, the prime minister should be blamed for none of the above. I am prepared to suspend disbelief on this key point. After all, globalization of the economy, the downsizing of government, the dissolution of consensus politics, and disaffection with the nation state all occurred in other western democracies, with support — enthusiastic or reluctant — left, right, and centre across the political spectrum. Furthermore, I accept that although Mr. Mulroney was less than visionary, he knew where he wanted to go and how to get there, even under adverse circumstances. And yes, even though I did not much admire his rhetorical style, I appreciate his having pretty much spared us dramatic renditions along the lines of Mrs. Thatcher's party piece Attila the Hun or Mr. Reagan's Marie Antoinette.

All of these personal qualities, good and bad, are not the ultimate foundation for historical judgments. But the decline of Canada's will and capacity to function as a nation state is another

matter altogether. For having presided over the decline, whether as its author or as the mere agent of inexorable forces, Mr. Mulroney can fairly be judged. In the long term, I expect, 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

"In our half-dozen political parties, in a hundred assertive communities, in a thousand advocacy groups, we find spin doctors and polling experts, fundraisers and networkers, media people and tacticians. But in few of these, alas, do we find a coherent and plausible vision of Canada as a national political community."

of nothing better to do with that power than to denigrate and permanently dismantle it.

This crucial failing of Mr. Mulroney, this legacy of his decade in office, defines the challenge of Canadian politics for the 1990s. We have to discover whether we can reinvent ourselves as a national political community with a sense of purpose and the means of being purposeful.

This will not be easy. We do not have a plethora of political leaders with national vision. If we were suddenly to acquire them, they would be hard pressed to achieve broad support across the widening fault

lines of region, class, language, ethnicity, gender, and special interest. And if an able and visionary prime minister were somehow to arrive in Ottawa, with a strong majority, she or he would be taking office, not power. Power, post-Mulroney, is not what it used to be.

The power of the purse is spent. Deficit reduction trumps all; prospects of new revenue are meagre; the spending power is no longer considered a legitimate basis for new federal initiatives; and the federal leverage gained in past decades through shared-cost programs diminishes daily as transfer payments shrink in size and as a proportion of provincial revenue.

The power of legislation is dilute and dubious. On the one hand, the Charter is being used not just to challenge statutes and administrative practices, but to make even quite determined governments more risk-averse. On the other, a half-century of disappointments with the interventionist state has undermined confidence that we can accomplish social transformation by enacting statutes.

The power of ideas still has a certain allure, especially to an academic, but without the power of persuasion, ideas do not count for much in electoral politics. However, though persuasion has great potency, these days it has a short shelf life as well. Governments come to office with careful plans and sincere promises only to find their election mani-

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festos vetoed by sudden shifts in the economy. Then they stand accused not of bad timing or inadequate research, but of hypocrisy and deception. Good people run for public office, only to find that we are ready to think the worst of them if they run afoul of irate interest groups, are found to have committed youthful indiscretions, or experience domestic discord. Life is long, but credibility is fleeting.

Power, then, seems to rest on not much more than mastery of the technology of politics: media relations, sophisticated polling, patronage, the ability to excite or mollify important constituencies, fundraising, dirty tricks. And Mr. Mulroney survived for 10 years against sometimes fearsome odds precisely because he was a brilliant political technologist. Whoever seeks to succeed him must apparently imitate him. But to what end? With what prospects?

We hear a lot about the new politics today. I hope that indeed we can invent a new politics. But the new politics often look a lot like the old politics played by new people, adept at the new political technology. In our half-dozen political parties, in a hundred assertive communities, in a thousand advocacy groups, we find spin doctors and polling experts, fundraisers and networkers, media people and tacticians. But in few of these, alas, do we find a coherent and plausible vision of Canada as a national political community. It is not Mr. Mulroney alone who failed us during the eighties. But it is he alone who was prime minister for almost 10 years, so it will be his failure to propose a national vision that will be remembered longest.

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THE MULRONEY LEGACY

by James Gilles

If one is inclined to evaluate the performance of political leaders by their current standings in the polls, one may well conclude that Prime Minister Mulroney is leaving the office as one of the most ineffective and unpopular persons ever to be prime minister. If, however, one believes, as did John Diefenbaker, that polls are for dogs, and that something more than the fickle affection of the public should be considered when evaluating the work of political leaders, one might well conclude

"It is certainly a feasible hypothesis that forcing adjustments in the Canadian economy through moving toward freer trade may be the most important action, in terms of ensuring a high standard of living for most Canadians, taken by any prime minister in the 20th century."

that history may judge Brian Mulroney as one of the stronger and more effective 20th-century Canadian leaders.

It has been Mulroney's fate to be prime minister during a period of incredible economic and institutional change. Whether we like it or not, during the eight and a half years of his leadership, the technological developments in communications and transportation have in fact made it possible for the world to be a single market for the production and distribution of goods and services. For consumers throughout the world to obtain the benefits of these great technological changes, there has had to be equally dramatic elimination of the institutional barriers to trade and commerce and a lowering of all types of

tariff barriers, which, through GATT and other measures, has been inexorably taking place. Mulroney realized better than most political leaders, who reflected local and regional fears of change, that Canada's future as a trading nation was dependent on the capacity of the country to respond to, not hide from, the consequences of these changes. He knew that the restructuring of the world economy was not going to go away and so he led the country into the bilateral trade agreement with the United States, which although causing painful adjustments, is forcing the changes that will give Canadian firms a fighting chance to trade and prosper in the global markets of the 21st century.

Similarly, he recognized that it would be impossible to maintain the rich and generous social programs in the nation without substantial increases in tax revenues. In a free trade world, a manufacturers' tax made no sense and so its replacement with a value-added tax of some sort — a tax that is used in every western industrial country in the world with the exception of the United States — was inevitable. Enacting any tax makes a leader unpopular; enacting a consumer-oriented tax only makes the unpopularity greater.

Prime Minister Mulroney also knew that the changes in the demographic structure and distribution of income in the nation called for revisions in the social security programs. And he led his government in making these unpopular but essential changes so that more support could be directed to those that needed it most.

Years ago Robert Stanfield constantly made the point that, if governments were to do things efficiently,