

they would have to do less—that they were stretched in many respects beyond their capabilities. Mulroney recognized this and was instrumental in moving certain functions from the public to the private sector where they could be operated more efficiently and without a drain on the taxpayer.

When it comes to assessing truly significant actions, it is difficult to arrange them in any order of priority. 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. At the same time, it cannot be considered more important than the role played by the prime minister in keeping the country together in a period of rising regional nationalism all over the world. Mulroney's deep and abiding faith in, and understanding of, Quebec has been critical in maintaining national unity during very arduous times. Although he failed to gain his constitutional goals during his years in office, the federalists did hold off the attacks of the separatists in every direct encounter.

A democratic nation works best when there are strong national political parties with representation from all parts of the country. Although the Liberal party from time to time in the 20th century was less than national because of its inability to elect members from western Canada, the Progressive Conservative party was always less than national because of its lack of support from Quebec. Even

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the most ardent Progressive Conservative never argued that Diefenbaker's success in Quebec represented any deep-rooted development of the party in that province. However, Mulroney, a son of the province, brought people to the party and gave Quebecers a choice when voting in a federal election. While he was prime minister, Canada had two truly national parties—not an insignificant achievement.

Finally, Mulroney was a winner. He led the Progressive Conservative party to two majority governments with representation from all

parts of the nation. And, in politics, being a winner is one of the most important of all considerations—you cannot do much in opposition.

There is a view that Mulroney had no ideas, was too much the pedestrian politician, was too loyal to his friends, was too partisan, was not willing to stay the course of tough policies—in short, that he embodied all the characteristics that make politicians unattractive. And, indeed, Mulroney had many of the well-known characteristics of the traditional political stereotypes—he was loyal to friends long after the time when it might have been to his own personal benefit to drop them; he did believe that you "danced with the girl that brung you"; he did enjoy the perks of office and the friends in high places that came with the office. But to stress these things is to quibble. On the tough issues—free trade, taxation, Quebec—he held the course and history will treat him very well for doing so.

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## THE DEMISE OF ANGLO-AMERICAN NEOCONSERVATISM

by Mel Watkins

Ronald Reagan is out of office and, say the polls, is remembered by the American public even less fondly than the failed Jimmy Carter, while his successor, George Bush, has joined Carter on the short list of presidents denied a second term. Margaret Thatcher is removed from office by her own party to avoid its defeat in an election; the ploy works, but now John Major looks like a minor leaguer in major trouble. Finally, with too long a lag, to widespread public acclaim and vast relief, Brian Mulroney concedes the

hopelessness of his situation and goes; a Tory defeat at the hands of the electorate, had he chosen to stay, is as certain as anything can ever be in politics. The last pillar in the North Atlantic triangle of neoconservatism has crumbled.

Reagan and Thatcher were, of course, its points of strength. As befits Canada, Mulroney was mostly the sycophant. (Val Sears writes in the *Toronto Star* about how Mulroney rushed off to Washington "as fast as his knees could carry him.") His originality consisted in smuggling

neoconservatism into Canada through the back door via the Canada-U.S. free trade agreement; that, too, is consistent with Canada's dependent status. That agreement, in its turn, wilfully ties the hands of Canadian governments and promotes the integration of the two economies and the harmonization of the two societies to the obvious detriment of the distinctiveness of the smaller. It risks making fatal that fundamental flaw of dependency.

The good news here, however, is that Mulroney's passing marks the

demise of Anglo-American neoconservatism. The damage it has done may never be undone and its legacy of deficits and debt (amazing if you think about it, since the rhetoric was fiscal responsibility) haunts successor governments and has rendered provincial NDP governments impotent in this country (perhaps that handcuffing of the future was the real intent). But its great failing, the cause of its ultimate undoing, is that it has been unable to deliver the economic growth that it so freely predicted (remember all those jobs that free trade was going to create?). The irony of neoconservative governments is that they were elected because of hard times and have managed to make them worse.

New governments, like Clinton's, are trying to repair the damage. If that fails, the best bet is that publics will opt not for another round of neoconservatism, but stronger state interventionism. My guess is that the Mulroneys of this world are truly toast.

The other area of activism for Mulroney (like other neoconservatives, he preached quiescent government while keeping busy in practice) was the constitution. Here he failed in a manner that is not merely a matter of my judgment.

Admittedly, it can be seen, up to a point, as a noble failure. He put together the improbable alliance of Alberta conservatives and Quebec nationalists and gave his party an unprecedented status in Quebec. He negotiated the Meech Lake Accord, which admitted that Quebec was a

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distinct society, but he lost his touch when it came to understanding the insistence on inclusion by the rest of us, the others, both in the process and in the final product. That deficiency cost him, and us, the possibility of a better and more inclusive Meech that just might have flown.

For that he might still be forgiven. What is unforgivable is that the second time, with the Charlottetown Accord, it is mostly

the same elitist process that is relied upon. That failure is the final nail in Mulroney's coffin, as it should be, but it is also perhaps a very costly failure for Canada. It is uncertain when we shall again have a politician with the credentials to deal with constitutional matters that Mulroney initially had and with a Quebec government amenable to a deal. Should the country break up, Mulroney risks being remembered in the history books not for what he tried to do, but for what he failed to achieve.

Perhaps this, too, must be judged a consequence of the neoconservative mindset. It is by its nature hopelessly elitist (at the end of the road, big business knows best). Those who buy too fully into it, even if they start with the considerable political talents of a Brian Mulroney, lose their populist touch, their feeling for democracy. Appropriately, they typically find their retirement rewards in corporate directorships and legal retainers, the cosseted sinecures of that corporate world they have long been serving.

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## MULRONEY FOREIGN AND DEFENCE POLICY

by J.L. Granatstein

One moment remains indelibly in the mind from the first "summit" in Quebec City in 1985: Brian Mulroney and Ronald Reagan and their wives on the stage singing "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling." Although he was already in advanced senility, poor Reagan had enough dignity to resent that he was being used. Much younger and more vigorous than his guest, somehow poor added Mulroney thought that his

shared Irishness would help with Reagan and that his electorate would love him for his ability to schmooze in public with the president. No miscalculation was ever so egregious, for that tuneless quartet probably marked the onset of Canadians' abiding mistrust of their leader.

But we ought to have known what to expect. Mulroney had already declared "superb" relations with the United States his goal, he had pro-

nounced Canada "open for business," and he had already given ample indication that his government would follow the Americans almost everywhere their foreign policies took them. And he did. He supported the Americans' bombing of Libya, their invasion of Panama, their war against Iraq, and their intervention in Somalia. Sometimes he was right to do so, sometimes not, but his support was constant. The