

20 YEARS OF PRIME MINISTERS IN POLICY OPTIONS

20 ANS DE PREMIERS MINISTRES DANS OPTIONS POLITIQUES

This year marks Policy Options' 20th anniversary. To celebrate we are running excerpts from the archives. In this issue, to accompany our cover story, we look at how different prime ministers have been treated in our pages over the years.

Notre revue célèbre cette année son vingtième anniversaire. À cette occasion, nous publions divers documents tirés de nos archives. Nous reproduisons ce mois-ci les jugements que divers collaborateurs d'Options politiques ont portés sur les différents premiers ministres du Canada au cours des années.

CONCILIATORY COALITIONS BASED ON PRAGMATISM

There were some who suggested that the Conservative party under Mr. Stanfield suffered from no lack of substance in terms of policy development and policy decisions, but perhaps just a modest lack of tactics and guile. There were others who suggested that the Conservative party under Mr. Clark suffered from no lack of organizational and tactical ability or skill, but perhaps from a modest lack of substance. However fair these analyses may or may not be, it is clear that the Conservative party under Mr. Mulroney has the opportunity to bring both substance and tactics together and shape a new coalition.

The shaping of that coalition will largely be based on conciliation. Dalton Camp has indicated how unique and appropriate it is that the Conservative party at this point in the country's history should have as its leader an individual whose one overwhelming area of professional preparation and skill is that of labour negotiation and conciliation. In bad times, the Conservative party needs conciliation merely to keep its own ships from running aground. In good times, the Conservative party has offered the country its conciliation skills, its coalition building skills, to help the country move toward its next goals and pursue its own purposes.

Historically, the winning coalitions that have been built, whether they have been used well or squandered by Conservatives, have been conciliatory coalitions based on pragmatism, common interest and common opportunity.

Hugh SEGAL

September 1983

POLL-WATCHER Canada's party system arose out of the nature of our country, especially the need to tie together diverse regions and linguistic groups into a political whole. Non-ideological parties at the national level seemed best able to fulfill those pre-eminent tasks. Certainly John A Macdonald and Mackenzie King didn't have polls to tell them that political success lay in pragmatic, brokerage politics. They knew it from their lives' experience in politics.

These days, polls can certainly be used to confirm the wisdom of Macdonald and King: namely that the country still prefers pragmatic, brokerage politics. Within our largest province, the Ontario Conservative party, in later years known as the Big Blue Machine, governed as if polls were the Holy Grail. Certainly the Ontario Conservatives achieved a quite remarkable degree of political success. It's intriguing to note, however, that the Liberals who replaced them put a good deal less stock in polls.

The Prime Minister took the Big Blue Machine as a role model for his own political success. As the pollster for both has told friends, he, Allan Gregg, has never, ever worked for someone who hangs on the polls as much as the current Prime Minister. Forget, therefore as self-serving, defensive twaddle that stuff about Mr. Mulroney paying little attention to the polls. Yet it's pretty clear that two years and a bit of poll-watching by Mr. Mulroney have not produced resoundingly effective or attractive government.

Jeffrey SIMPSON

March 1987

THE ESSENTIAL OF SUCCESS IN CANADIAN POLITICS

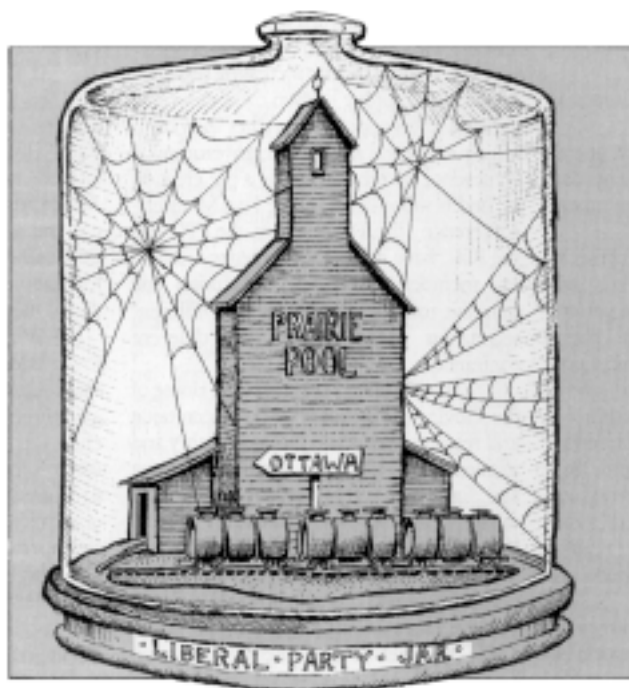
It would be wrong to say the St. Laurent government was chucked out of office. What would be more nearly correct would be to say that, the government demonstrably having worn out, Canadians set about choosing another with rather less passion than they would bring to the choice of a replacement of the family car in similar circumstances. Hence the John Diefenbaker government, the only other model seriously on offer. With that, we entered the decade-and-a-bit of our Great Unease.

Neither John Diefenbaker nor Lester B. Pearson, who shared that decade, went about things as prime minister in that seemingly divinely-guided, magisterial, self-assured, calming (soporific?) way, that, according to my thesis, is the prime essential of success in Canadian politics—success, of course, being measured in terms not of accomplishment but of staying-power.

Canadian prime ministers are not graded according to what they do, but by how long the electorate can be persuaded to allow them to do it, however little, in.

George BAIN

June 1980



Richard Whyte, 1980

THE AGE OF POLITICAL IMPERSONATION ...The depersonalization of society has led to the false personalization of politics. It is not a genuine personalization but rather a form of personism or impersonation. Political impersonation is the phenomenon that we have painfully experienced in the 1979 and 1980 elections.

Our vehement hostility to Trudeau or our acute anxiety about Clark are indeed the most virulent evidence of the breakdown of our system of political decision-making and responsibility. When we recall that both elections occurred during a period of deep national anxiety, major unresolved questions of our national destiny and shifting economic and energy issues, one is struck by the extreme irrationality and total insufficiency of the process.

It seems clear that future elections will be increasingly irrational, unless we begin now to ensure that communication systems have real public responsibility and that parliamentary and government activity is genuinely open and accountable.

David MACDONALD

June 1980

THE POLITICS OF TRIVIAL PURSUIT Why is the Mulroney PMO the way it is? Why is it engaged in the picayune world of detailed contracts that in previous periods would be handled by line Ministers and departments? No one factor explains this dangerous drift into the politics of trivial pursuit.

Part of the explanation resides in the personality and experience of the Prime Minister. He appears to be an especially partisan person anxious to tilt at the least political windmill. Quite properly he wants to consolidate the Conservatives as a more permanent majority force in Canadian political life. For him, as a Quebecer, this means in particular a need to solidify support in his own power base, where he knows his mercurial support in

1984 was just that: mercurial. Some of the partisanship is necessary and healthy, but Mulroney's own evolution out of the backrooms of politics has clearly produced the excesses of cronyism and contractual largesse that now plague his government.

The cronyism of the Mulroney style would not in itself be politically fatal, or as worrisome, if it were accompanied by a strong sense of his own agenda and values, to which he gave evident and persistent reinforcement. His government is given some credit for a reasonably clear macro-economic policy, but even here, as often as not, credit is given to Finance Minister Michael Wilson, for fighting off the Mulroney flights of policy fancy.

G. Bruce DOERN

May 1987

TRUDEAU-BASHING REPLACES HNIC

Trudeau-bashing in many parts of the West has replaced Hockey Night in Canada for regional relaxation. The Prime Minister, whose patrician bilingual image peculiarly endows him to be a scapegoat for the West, has become isolated in the minds of many as virtually the sole cause of western discontents...

In political disputes, historical facts often become irrelevant. In the current climate, would better communications between federal and provincial governments and between provincial governments accomplish any-

thing more than make things worse? And what form should better communications take? There are vociferous souls who seem to think that all that is needed is the absence of Mr. Trudeau, so that his early retirement should be encouraged; this simplistic view ignores the truism that in politics one scapegoat is often followed by another. It would at least be worth attempting to use the remedy ... of improving western representation in Mr. Trudeau's cabinet.

Norman WARD

June 1981

MULRONEY'S GAMBLE The changing level of support for a Continental Free Trade Agreement (CFTA) seems to be bound up with the popularity of the government and of Mr. Mulroney in particular. Trust is vital on a matter fraught with imponderables, yet polls have shown Canadians to be closely divided about whether they have confidence in the Prime Minister to protect their interests in negotiations. Urged from many quarters to demonstrate strong leadership, he risks much by doing so on the free-trade issue; his many equivocal statements about the CFTA indicate that this is sometimes understood.

There may be time to turn things around before the talks produce an agreement, but it seems certain that by trying to force through a CFTA, the Prime Minister would create deep divisions along regional, class and perhaps ethnic lines. He might well lose power.

R.A. YOUNG

May 1986



Martin Vaughn-James, 1981

GOING MANAGERIAL Ever since Confederation, Canadians have accepted leadership equally from politicians of both "Trudeau" and "Clark" styles. It would appear to me that we are now entering, if we have not already done so, an era of "managerial" as opposed to "charismatic" politics. Support for this view can certainly be drawn from the array of provincial Premiers now in office, not to mention the difficulties encountered by Edward Kennedy in his quest for the Presidency of the United States through a campaign based almost entirely on the supposed magic of his name.

As a country we have been spinning our wheels for some time. As a sense of frustration spread across the land, Canadians have indulged themselves in being quarrelsome,

petty and, worst of all, indifferent to anything but their own most immediate concerns. The tragedy of the election, it seems to me, is that it has done nothing to alleviate these feelings, but rather has served to reinforce them. The re-election of Mr. Trudeau and the Liberals was greeted not by an outpouring of joy or sense of national rededication, but only with vague greyness that was as dull and dreary as the sober Tory concerns the voters so clearly rejected. It seemed almost as if the majority of the voters, particularly those living in Ontario, were somewhat sheepish at what they had done. Not ashamed, not regretful—but definitely sheepish.

Michael MEIGHEN

June 1980

LIBERAL ONTARIO Canadians went to the polls in a general election seven times between 1963 and 1980. The Liberals, returned to power in 1963, remained in power after every one of these elections with the exception of that of 1979... In none of the seven contests did the Liberals win a majority of the seats west of Ontario (their best showing was in 1968, when they won twenty-eight of the seventy seats) while in Quebec their victories were overwhelming, their total falling below fifty-six (of seventy-five) only in 1963, when they won forty-seven of the seats with twenty-six of the remainder being won by Mr. Caouette and the Creditistes.

The results from Atlantic Canada were mixed, but favoured the PCs - in only two elections (1963 and 1980) did the Liberals win a majority of the seats in Atlantic Canada. It was Ontario that provided the margin of victory in each election, with the sole exception of 1972, when the Liberals retained power by a two-seat margin: in that election, they retained thirty-six of the eighty-eight Ontario seats, while the PCs won forty.

Ed ROBERTS

June 1980



Frampton, 1988

LIBERAL SASKATCHEWAN Early in the century the Liberals had superb control of the prairies; they could elect whatever support they needed, as Sir Clifford Sifton held forth. Sir Clifford understood his people, related to his people, and included them in his decision-making. The millions of immigrants who settled the prairies did so as a result of popular Sifton policies. Barry Broadfoot who has researched the trials and tribulations of the early western settlers refers to a mid-European immigrant who came to the West looking for a place called "Liberal Saskatchewan."

Stan ROBERTS

June 1980

TRUDEAU'S WESTERN DILEMMA The new Prime Minister was prompt to restrain the enthusiasm for instant electoral reform despite his own comments, at the time of his autumnal retirement, favourable to proportional representation. But in view of his need to compose a cabinet and the Canadian custom of including members from each province wherever possible (which it was not in Saskatchewan and Alberta on several occasions in recent years), Mr. Trudeau sent his two Manitoba MP's to reconnoitre the territory. They returned a week later, having heard several possible ways western Liberals might enter the cabinet, only to recommend the least imaginative route—via the Senate.

The three Senators Mr. Trudeau then chose make it realistic to doubt that Liberals in the West will profit at all in terms of additional support at the next election.

Another possibility, which apparently never enjoyed

favour in Ottawa, would have been to run western Liberals in safe eastern seats. The delayed election in the riding of Frontenac provided an opportunity to put that idea to the test, but it was rejected even by some western Liberals, as "parachuting," with the implication that parachuting was devious as well as impractical.

Yet there is, or at least was, a Canadian tradition for prominent candidates to move out of province. Angus MacDonald, premier of Nova Scotia before and after his federal political career, ran in and won the Kingston by-election in 1940. Charles Dunning, once premier of Saskatchewan, won Queen's, P.E.I. in a by-election in 1953. Mackenzie King, when defeated in York North in 1926, turned to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, which he then held for nearly two decades.

David SMITH

June 1980

TRUDEAU'S CENTRAL ACHIEVEMENT It is important that, however unpopular the Trudeau regime may prove to have become, we should all recognize the central achievement which, if the Canadian nation survives, has ensured for this regime a crucial role in the evolution of the country.

Mr. Trudeau and his close associates went to Ottawa to save federalism. They sensed, correctly, that in this cause it was necessary to demonstrate that Quebecers could take over the leadership of the federal government, not in the sense that Laurier and St. Laurent had presided over governments that were primarily those of British Canadians (English is incorrect, given the predominance of Scots) but in the more fundamental sense that the policy and practice of the government would reflect a large element of French-Canadian attitudes and culture.

If this demonstration had not been successfully made in the 1970s the survival of the Canadian state would have been doubtful indeed. We owe Mr. Trudeau great gratitude for it; we must hope that our descendants will continue to benefit from it. The danger is that embittered opponents will take a shorter view.

Tom KENT

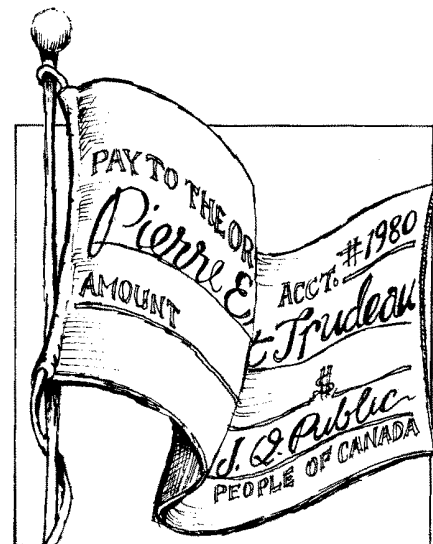
January 1984

TRUDEAU'S TRAVELS It is one of the supreme ironies of Pierre Trudeau's years in office that, although he has travelled more widely than any other Prime Minister, most Canadians feel that he is both unaware and unconcerned about their dreams and their fears and their hopes and their worries. Mr. John Crosbie, in the course of a tumultuously unsuccessful political career which has seen him frustrated in his efforts to win the leadership of both a provincial party and a federal party as well as one of his own creation, has left exactly the same impression. That is one of the reasons why Mr. Mulroney beat him.

The new Prime Minister would do well to remember and to profit from the example.

Ed ROBERTS

July 1984



Richard Whyte, 1980

WAS EXTERNAL NECESSARY? When Pierre Trudeau first became prime minister in 1968, he was known to ask senior External Affairs persons if their department was really necessary. If the conversation survived that gambit, he would go on to ask why the different departments of government that were running operations abroad couldn't manage their affairs outside Canada in exactly the same way as they ran them at home. Coordination, if needed, could be provided by the Prime Minister's Office.

Apparently he never received, or discovered for himself, an answer that satisfied him. To the end, he behaved as though the foreign service was nothing more than an elaborate and expensive courier service. Its reporting, he let it be known, was less expert and extensive than that of the *New York Times*...

After some 15 years at or near the centre of government, this worldly and intelligent man continued to hold his red-neck view of diplomacy. The most briefable of prime ministers was unteachable on this subject and presumably for the usual reason; he did not wish to learn.

Arthur ANDREW

March 1991