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THE SECRET MULRONEY TAPES

—
Unguarded Confessions of a Prime Minister
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PETER C. NEWMAN



RANDOM HOUSE CANADA

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“The sweetest deal ever known
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The Meech Lake Accord

IN “SILVER BLAZE,” Sherlock Holmes solves a mysterious murder when he realizes why a guard dog didn’t bark. The failed Meech Lake Accord—the designated centrepiece of Brian Mulroney’s second term—was the “dog that didn’t bark” of his controversial time in office. From the initial meeting at a government lodge in the Gatineau Hills on April 30, 1987, where the constitutional agreement between the PM and provincial premiers was breech-birthed, to the day the accord died in the Newfoundland and Manitoba legislatures—June 23, 1990—the issue dominated the national agenda. It proved that what doesn’t happen can be as significant as what does.

Someone once defined Canada as being the only nation in the world where books on federal-provincial relations are sold at airports. Meech Lake roused hope and

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anger in equal proportions, but at least it proved that thesis to be true. Canadians went to the wall over complicated constitutional subtleties that no one, including those books' authors, fully understood. At one point in the debate, Jean Chrétien, the Liberal leader and a Meech opponent, told a *Maclean's* reporter, "Lac Meech, Lac Meech. Eventually people dream about Lac Meech. Nobody knows what it is."

Mulroney's legitimate reason for Meech was not to make history, but to rectify it. In his 1981 rush to patriate the Constitution, Trudeau failed to create the conditions that might have allowed Quebec premier René Lévesque to buy into the deal (which was hardly surprising since making the country work better was not exactly part of Lévesque's separatist agenda). In return for signing on to the constitution, the Mulroney accord granted Quebec distinct society status. But the offer was extended in typically Canadian fashion: nearly everyone outside Quebec was against it, except its sponsors, who claimed that deep down distinct status was virtually meaningless. What could be better?

Having no familiar framework in which to fit the inexorable nationalistic impulses of a large number of Quebecers, the rest of the country interpreted Meech as the hot breath of revolution. Yet all that moderate Quebec nationalists really wanted was reassurance in writing that they were different. That was demonstrably true: French and English Canadians live in different languages by separate legal codes, enjoy diverse cultures and have a common past but little common history.

Meech was a unique phenomenon. The analysis of its 7,425-word text became a growth industry with its own momentum. At its most intense, the Meech Lake debate threatened reputations in academic halls and triggered fisticuffs in beer parlours. The process by which Meech was created bypassed established bureaucratic forms and customs. There were no formal minutes of the tense

negotiating session at Meech Lake. Subtle agreement among the participants was transmitted mainly by body language. As Andrew Cohen, who wrote the best book on Meech (*A Deal Undone*), described it, "Glance rather than stare, stare rather than wink, wink rather than nod, nod rather than whisper, whisper rather than speak, speak rather than write. No doubt many wanted to frame the constitution that way. Ambiguity meant flexibility. It allowed the drafters to avoid fixed positions. Making hard decisions meant a flaring of tempers, a clash of wills and, ideally, a meeting of minds."

Robert Bourassa, the Quebec premier who ended up on the firing line, declared, "You can break modern Quebec history into two stages: pre- and post-Meech. Without Quebec's signature on the Constitution, there is a hole in the heart of most Quebecers. I thought that with Meech, we could heal that."

The agreement was far from perfect. It made no provision for the constitutional future of the First Nations and the special concerns of women's groups. But neutral observers concluded that the legitimate reason for giving Meech priority was that it made so little sense not to. Meech became a totem, crossing party lines, corralling such disparate supporters as Ed Broadbent, Bob Rae and Stephen Lewis of the NDP; Liberals John Turner, Paul Martin and Sheila Copps; as well as most community leaders, unionists and pundits, myself included.

The Opposition was field-marched by a ghost come to life. During the original Meech Lake meeting, Joe Ghiz, the premier of PEI, noted an invisible presence haunting the conference: "There was another man in the room that day. We talked about him quite a bit. He was there. He was there in spirit. He was Pierre Trudeau." That phantom of the Meech Lake opera morphed into the dominant presence in the debating that followed. Instead of supporting Bourassa's willingness to opt into his constitution, Trudeau came out, mouth blazing, and cursed "the

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snivelling eunuchs of premiers" and "the wimp of a prime minister" who wanted to render "Canada totally impotent." He then toured the country, musing in TV studios and newspaper offices that Canada had no claim to immortality and that he, for one, would not "hang himself in a loft" if Quebec were to separate.

In response, Mulroney became a heat-seeking missile, speaking (it seemed) to each Rotary Club and in every church basement from sea to sea. Even visitors to Canada were not exempt from his proselytizing. At a private breakfast he hosted at 24 Sussex for Robert and Elizabeth Dole, then America's most distinguished power couple—he was the senior senator from Kansas and later the Republican presidential candidate, she the secretary of labour in the first Bush cabinet—he spent most of the meal explaining Meech.

"Forget Canada," he told them. "Let's assume that the United States decided they had to have a new constitution, and all the states met with the federal administration for an extended period of time. Finally, they came up with a new document. But it was not endorsed by New York, California and Texas. That's approximately the breakout equivalent of Quebec's population in this country."

The Doles looked baffled as to how any such thing could happen.

"It gets better," Mulroney sarcastically assured them. "In those negotiations, the governors of the fifty states wound up with the power to override every provision of the American Bill of Rights and all decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court."

Elizabeth Dole, who had been a candidate for the Supreme Court, couldn't resist. "Are you telling me that the governor of Mississippi would have been given the right to overrule Supreme Court decisions on issues of civil rights?"

"That's exactly what I'm telling you," Mulroney shot back.

"Who did this?" she demanded.

"Guess who? Pierre Trudeau, the same fellow who today is demanding perfection in the Meech Lake Accord!"

HAD THE DOLES STUCK AROUND for the final chapter in the Meech saga, they would have been even more incredulous.

Enter Clyde Wells. Although he had made a fetish out of refusing to move on Meech Lake without consulting "the people," the Newfoundland premier announced unilaterally on the day after his party was elected—April 20, 1989—that he now had a mandate to renegotiate Meech Lake, an intention absent from his platform. Without holding any public hearings during the fourteen months of his premiership, Wells rescinded his predecessor's signature on the accord. Like Trudeau, who was Wells's friend and mentor, Wells was adamantly opposed to Quebec's being recognized as distinct in any respect. Such a position was particularly galling for a Newfoundland premier to take because that province's own terms of union with Canada in 1949 contained "several provisions conferring powers and imposing obligations quite distinct from those of any other province."

At the final week-long bargaining session in Ottawa that ended on June 9, 1990, Wells himself drafted the communiqué that pledged him to use "every possible effort" on behalf of the accord by putting it to either a referendum or a free vote in his legislative assembly. To demonstrate that intent, Wells invited Mulroney, as well as the premiers of Ontario, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick, to make their case to the Newfoundland legislature, with the clear pledge that a vote would follow. On the Thursday evening before the Meech deadline, at a private dinner at his home with Mulroney, Wells was still reassuring the PM that he would call the vote. An

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informal poll taken that evening showed that Meech would have passed in the Newfoundland legislature by a margin of two votes.

Wells's view of the nation's future, bound up in the dreams and past glories of Pierre Trudeau, added up to obstruction for its own sake. The premier attacked the accord like an old-fashioned prosecuting lawyer delivering his final summation in a series of righteous thunderbolts, his arguments marshalled not to prove that he was right, but to prove that no other version of events dared exist. When he was in private legal practice, Wells eschewed partners. He preferred wet-eared juniors who would do his bidding. In cabinet meetings, he treated most of his ministers like superannuated flunkies. An apocryphal story then making the rounds in St. John's had Wells inviting his nondescript cabinet to the Hotel Newfoundland. "And what would you like for lunch, Mr. Wells?" asked the waitress.

"Roast beef."

"And the vegetables?"

"Oh," replied the premier, gesturing around the table, "they'll have roast beef, too."

Flexibility was not Wells's strong suit. The east coast broadcaster and columnist Michael Harris told me a story that perfectly defined the man's mentality. One of the tasks of Wells's private secretary was to balance the firm's books. One day, the books were one cent short. Knowing how fussy her boss was, she made a one-cent deposit, which he discovered when the bank statements arrived. Instead of being pleased, he called her into his office and sternly lectured her that two wrongs do not make a right. That was Clyde Wells.

MEANWHILE, A TENSE DRAMA of a different kind had been evolving in Ottawa. On the Sunday morning after obtaining the late-night signatures on his accord, Mulroney started calling around to various "friends of

Meech" to share his triumph. On the list was William Thorsell, then the editor of the *Globe and Mail* and the PM's most compliant media confidant. They agreed Mulroney would give the paper an exclusive interview for Monday, recounting his impressive negotiations. Assigned to the story were Ottawa bureau chief Graham Fraser, political columnist Jeffrey Simpson and Parliament Hill reporter Susan Delacourt. The *Globe* journalists treated their assignment as a chance to record Mulroney's sense of triumph against impossible odds. No prime minister in modern times had managed to obtain unanimous approval for a constitutional amendment that included Quebec.

"I can say that, yes, the interview was amiable, and from our perspective deliberately so," Simpson wrote to me later. "We discussed how to approach the interview at some length beforehand. We knew that with Trudeau, for example, it was often best to be aggressive since that might elicit the most information. With Mulroney, it was obvious that he loved to talk about himself, his triumphs. Since he had just recorded one, or so he thought, and had phoned Thorsell to brag about it and relive it, we deliberately decided to offer him soft questions so that he would be relaxed, self-congratulatory, revelatory—which of course he was. The rest, as they say, is history, including his attempt subsequently to recast what he had said."

The journalists arrived at 24 Sussex at eleven o'clock on the Monday morning. Though Mulroney looked sleep deprived, he was exhilarated, anxious to expound on his negotiating triumph. Asked why he had opted to call a first ministers' conference for the first week of June—ominously close to the accord's final implementation deadline—he replied, "I decided, after consultations with my colleagues, mostly Lowell Murray, Paul Tellier, Norman Spector, and people like this, that . . . I remember when I told them, I called them right here, I asked

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them to come and see me, and I told them when this thing was going to take place. I told them a month ago when we were going to start meeting. It's like an election campaign: you've got to work backwards. You've got to pick your dates and you work backwards from it. And that . . . and I said that's the day I'm going to roll all the dice. It's the only way to handle it."

"And this was a month ago?" asked Fraser.

"About a month ago," said the prime minister.

"Roll of the dice . . . This was a conscious, obvious decision," Simpson reiterated, to make sure he had heard right.

"You had to roll all the . . . the only way that this could be done was to roll all the dice," the prime minister emphasized.

The next day's *Globe* led with the story, under the heading, "Marathon Talks Were All Part of Plan, PM Says." Its third paragraph included that fateful "roll of the dice" metaphor, which was widely interpreted as Mulroney's willingness to gamble with Canada's future. "In the minds of just about everyone," wrote Allan Levine in *Scrum Wars*, his book on the politics of the press, "but especially Clyde Wells, poker talk of this sort confirmed yet again what many people had thought of Brian Mulroney for more than a decade: that he was a partisan, manipulative deal-maker who was willing to play 'Russian roulette with Canada,' as Christopher Young put it in his *Ottawa Citizen* column. Serious damage to the fragile constitutional agreement had been done."

Stanley Hartt, Mulroney's chief of staff, was being driven to work by his wife when he heard the "dice" quote. "It was instant," he later recalled. "I mean, it didn't take me half a millisecond. I asked her to pull the car over, stopped and said, 'He's finished. It's over. I think he blew it. I really do.'" Hartt had been carrying out secret negotiations with Chrétien, who had at last seemed willing to

voice his reluctant support for the accord, and who as a result backed off.¹

Mulroney insisted that the *Globe* had got it wrong. Claiming he had been quoted out of context, he complained vociferously to Thorsell, who agreed to publish the transcript made by the PMO of the taped session, which showed only one inconsequential deviation from the reported interview. Instead of, "That's the day I'm going to roll all the dice," Fraser had hurriedly scribbled that the PM had said, "That's the day *we're* going to roll the dice." The transcript conveyed Mulroney as an unbuttoned PM—the same private Mulroney profiled in this book, a wild contrast to his public persona of sulking statesman encased in a lawyerly cloak of self-protection. Mulroney had never allowed the press to get so close.

The final irony of this newspaper war was that what Mulroney said about picking a date and rolling the dice was simply not true, and he knew it. During the two months preceding the final conference, Norman Spector and Lowell Murray had been commuting to the provincial capitals and returning to Ottawa to warn the PM to postpone the meeting as long as he could because several premiers had cooled on the "distinct society" idea. Several foreign visits (including a drop-in by Gorbachev) also disrupted the schedule. But eventually Mulroney decided he had to go to war and "shoot the wad" (a less delicate but more appropriate description) because time was running out. In other words, the timing of the conference was not a gamble but a necessity, dressed up as a "roll of the dice" by the PM's Irish bravado.

Using the story as a pretext to claim he had been manipulated, Clyde Wells went back on his word and his signature on June 22, 1990, and disallowed a vote on Meech in his legislative assembly. The Manitoba legisla-

1. Although he used the "roll the dice" remark as his excuse, it was more the objections of his wife, Aline, that influenced him.

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ture similarly failed to vote on Meech, held up by the absence of the unanimous approval required for ratification. The agent of protest was the vote (cast with an upheld eagle feather) of MLA Elijah Harper, who was a member of the Red Sucker Lake First Nations band. Ottawa tried to find a way of extending the Manitoba deadline to lay the blame on Wells alone. The following day, at the Liberal leadership convention in Calgary, the TV image imprinted on the public mind was that of a smiling pair of Wells's co-conspirators, Trudeau and Chrétien, patting the Newfoundland premier on the back and congratulating him for a job well done.

Mulroney's reaction was blind rage against Wells. "You know all politicians take liberties—that's the nature of the beast, getting kicked around and trying to get things done in an imperfect system," he told me a few days after the last gasp of his love child. "But nothing has ever compared to the lack of principle of this son of a bitch. Lookit, on the night before the vote I was standing in the rain on the doorstep of his house and I asked him what the odds were. He told me that after my speech, they were good—at least fifty-fifty. This was *after* he had already made up his mind to cancel the vote." Mulroney's evidence for this claim came from many sources. The previous evening, Wells's chief of staff had confided to Dan Gagnier, Ontario premier David Peterson's chief of staff, that Wells had made up his mind that there would be no vote. Charley McMillan had similar intelligence from a New England conference of premiers and governors. Broadcaster Bill Cameron confronted Wells on CBC's *The Journal* with the direct question, "You mean to tell me that you had the prime minister of Canada in your house for three hours and you never told him that you had decided to cancel the vote the next day?" Wells's only reply was, "I don't remember."

The legacy of the Meech Lake debate outlasted its thirty-eight-month run. Its failure was the trigger

that drove Lucien Bouchard out of the Progressive Conservative Party to establish the Bloc Québécois and later to become his province's most successful separatist. It was also the catalyst that created the feud between Jean Chrétien, who opposed Meech, and Paul Martin, who was an enthusiastic supporter. At a Liberal rally in Montreal during the leadership contest between the two men, unilingual Paul Martin supporters bussed in from Toronto, feeling bored, started a meaningless sing-song using the French word for the melted cheese dish they had enjoyed at a restaurant the previous evening, "Fondue!" The Chrétien contingent swore they heard the taunting chant "Vendu!" ("Traitor!"), and went ape. As improbable as it sounds, this misunderstanding was the spark that lit the flame of the Chrétien camp's intense resentment of Martin and his followers.

Meech Lake turned into a drowning game. Nearly all of its architects were stripped of power within three years of its denouement, including David Peterson, one of its most enthusiastic backers. He had his political head chopped off in an election only eleven weeks after the accord's collapse. Meech's demise also prompted its backers to try out new variations on the theme, behaving like troubled soothsayers counting angels on Margaret Atwood's head.

The failure hit Mulroney the hardest. His superb negotiating skills had won the day only to have a province with 2 per cent of Canada's population, which existed mainly on federal grants, sabotage his efforts. Together with free trade, Meech had been his claim to greatness, and it had turned to dust. His despair found expression in his personal journal. On January 13, 1991, six months after the event, Mulroney gave voice to his anguish. At the end of one of our interviews, after a melancholy reprise of Clyde Wells's treachery, he read his journal entry for that day into my tape recorder: "Last night I told Mila of an enormous sadness in my heart that I have carried since the Wells decision to sabotage Meech. It is

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like a dark cloud that smothers the joy one would normally associate with the privilege of being prime minister of such a great country. For thirty years I have felt that the successful resolution of the question 'what does Quebec want,' would solidify the federation once and for all. The danger with 1981-1982 was that, unlike 1867, Quebec was no longer a willing partner in the agreement on Confederation. Indeed, by proceeding without Quebec, Trudeau gave rise to a new arrangement that Quebec could perhaps one day make—that since they never signed the 1982 convention they were neither morally nor legally bound by it. Accordingly, they would claim, we are not in violation of national or international law if we secede because we never formally accepted the Constitution in the first place. Twice in 1987 and then again in 1990 we achieved unanimity, although the 1990 document was qualified by Newfoundland and Manitoba. Meech was not perfect and it no doubt would have given rise to some controversy in the future. But by signing Meech, Bourassa truly became a Canadian and would have been forced by circumstances to defend his signature, hence Canada, against the onslaught of the anti-federalists. His enthusiasm for fence-sitting would have been dramatically lessened. By signing the document he took himself off the fence forever. Wells destroyed the Bourassa legacy as a Canadian nation builder. He may well have forced Bourassa into a process where the notion that the nation that emerges is not Canada, but two Canadas, both diminished and forever banal, is living proof of the failure of honourable compromise. When reason is replaced by ideology, the essential dynamic of a federation as a living, changing political entity has been fundamentally stunted. The greatest irony of Canadian history may turn out to be the one underlined by Jack Pickersgill [a former Liberal cabinet minister who sat for a Newfoundland riding]. Namely, Pick says, it was a Québécois, Louis St. Laurent, who engineered the compromises that in 1949

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enabled Newfoundland to enter Confederation. It was a Newfoundlander, Clyde Wells, who repudiated the compromises in 1990 which encouraged Quebec to leave Confederation. All of this does not lessen my own personal sense of grief for Canada. The experience since June has been like a death in the family, and I have not been able to shake fully the feeling of loss. To have come so close twice and to have it snatched away so needlessly to satisfy the vanity and arrogance of a few who themselves failed to bring unity when they were in office is like a throbbing pain that refuses to go away."

Mulroney just couldn't understand how Trudeau could have done it:

If you said to me, "We'd like a constitutional arrangement with the government of Canada and the nine English-speaking provinces," my question to you would be, "Would you like it for breakfast tomorrow morning or for dinner tomorrow night?" This is not a big challenge; anybody can do that any time. The challenge is the nine Anglo provinces and Quebec, because that's Canada.

If a constitution is supposed to unify people, how could you ever have a constitutional amendment of this dimension while leaving out one of the founding peoples? With Trudeau, not only was the end result a screw-up, the process was lost forever. Trudeau said we've got a thousand years before we've got to worry. Let's say he's wrong, and in fifteen years you're staring a referendum in the face—don't worry about it, because the country that you will have ruined is not yours, it's your children's. The country that you will have thrown away with a bunch of assholes like Trudeau and Chrétien is not yours anymore.

He wasn't the one to blame for the Americanization of Canada, Mulroney maintained:

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But Mulro direction:

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The Americanization of Canada didn't come from me. It came from the Charter. When the government brought in the Charter, it Americanized Canada. This was the beginning. It wasn't the free trade agreement; it was the Charter of Rights, which undertook to fund every interest group that the country has ever seen. The national interest began to be submerged in special interests. That's what I inherited in 1984, everybody from women's groups to Native groups to regional groups to gender groups—you name it. They were all in Ottawa in nice offices funded by the federal government.

The Meech Lake Accord was part of an overarching vision of national reconciliation and economic renewal. It's all part of what I said I was going to try and do. And my critics say, "Well, Trudeau had a vision of a strong central government." Isn't that interesting? The Anglo literati and glitterati would celebrate him for leading a strong central government, where he actually crippled the government with debt and undermined its credibility by giving away a notwithstanding clause. And he renders the country immobile constitutionally by proceeding without Quebec. This is the work of a strong man? This is a vision?

Chief of Staff Hugh Segal said Mulroney had a different view of the subject before entering politics:

Brian's position on the Constitution, as a private lawyer speaking out on the issue, was for a Charter of Rights, was for patriation, was for as much power as necessary in Ottawa.

But Mulroney was now prepared to move in another direction:

We had very limited time in which all of this had to be done. I met all of the premiers separately, hours on end. Four hours and forty minutes with Clyde Wells alone. It was just the most exhausting and intensive thing that's happened in Canadian history. Meech was an extraordinary thing.

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What was never captured by anyone was how hard we worked, and how much we cared. I can't tell you the effort and the anguish and the devotion to Canada which was there, that was trivialized and discarded.

Stanley Hartt, on Mulroney the negotiator:

Mulroney is, without a doubt, the most skilled cold negotiator that I've ever met, and the reason is, he fixes in his mind the objective, and he simply will not countenance that he won't get it. And he will just doggedly come back after it until your resistance has been pulled away. But secondly, he starts from a position of "I'm smart enough as a professional negotiator to know what you want, because if I just say what I want, give it to me, you'll just say no. But if I say, I know what you want and indeed I have great sympathy with what you want and it's important, your wanting it, and I'm going to help you get it—all of a sudden I have an ally."

I used to see that all the time in his labour negotiations. When he settled the *La Presse* strike, he was about two weeks out of law school and it had been going on for three years. He settled it in about six weeks because he's so good. He said, "Look, let's talk about what we have to get done. You need this, but I need that. There's no reason you can't give me what I need, and, guess what, I can give you what you need." That's how he did it.

But he could also blow it, too. In the case of the Meech negotiations, "roll the dice" came back to haunt him: NEWMAN: If you had said "Give it our best shot" instead of "Roll the dice," the consequences would've been very different.

MULRONEY: When I said that we were going to roll the dice, all it meant is we had that time frame imposed upon us, and we were going to give it our very best shot. That's all it meant.

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Remember when Pierre Trudeau said, "I'm planning a coup d'état. That's why I'm firing [Clerk of the Privy Council and constitutional advisor] Gordon Robertson." How do you like that for a statement? I was planning a coup d'état, but Gordon Robertson was too refined a gentleman, too respectful of the law, and I needed somebody who would organize and co-operate with me in a coup d'état, something that would damage irreversibly Canadian society if we had to. How do you like that for a stink? How do you like that compared to "roll the dice"?

Ontario premier David Peterson rolled his eyes:

A very good friend of his—not mine—who worked for him told me that he knew Brian was going to do that stupid "roll the dice" thing. He said, "I knew his braggadocio, I knew he could not stand other people getting any credit, I knew he would crack within three weeks." Mulroney killed it. All he had to say was, Clyde Wells is a great Canadian, Gary Filmon put the national interest first, it was very difficult and I'm very sorry we took all this time, but we had to try to work to narrow the differences, and that's the genius of this great country. At the end of the day, we all pulled together. He could have had them sucked in . . . Oh, God, I wept when that happened.

Robert Bourassa's support of Meech effectively ended Mulroney's friendship with Lucien Bouchard:

MULRONEY: Bourassa made that memorable speech, where he said, "Signing this document tonight, I feel like a real Canadian." And guess what? Bouchard's at home watching the television, and he just falls right through the floor. Because I did exactly what I said I would do. And therefore at that point in time, Bouchard's a dead man. He's a dead man. Separatists are done like dinner, at this point in time. But then Clyde Wells went back and revoked a constitutional amendment for the first time in British parliamentary history. Then he dishonoured his

signature on a constitutional document, and in his dishonour he relieved Bouchard of his. Bouchard—who is at this point in time paralyzed with fear because of what is going to happen—is [now] able to say, "I was for Meech Lake all along, but Clyde Wells and those Anglos wouldn't pass it."

Mila Mulroney was out doing her bit:

I said to friends, "There are minimal conditions to Meech Lake." And after I told them, I would ask, "Do any of these minimal conditions bother you?" And they would all say no. The fact is, very few people understood them. What they did understand is that the premiers met behind closed doors and they had lavish dinners, and that the media wasn't in, and the Natives were not represented.

Mila was harsh on the media:

You can't deliver a message in a country of this size with forty people in your cabinet if those meetings aren't being properly represented in the media and the newspapers. On the news, Meech was treated as a holdup in a gas station at six o'clock in the morning. My beef with Meech Lake was, why was Brian the only one selling it? And I was told, "Believe me, all of them are selling it, it's just not being reported." When people said to me, "Why isn't Brian selling it?" I said, "He is, but they're not reporting it." I'd ask that same question to Brian, and he'd say, "Mila, John Crosbie is out there in Newfoundland trying to do the best he can, but they're not reporting it."

One thing the Canadian media widely reported was Mulroney's flash visit to St. John's to seek support for the Meech Lake deal, when Wells was still giving the accord a fifty-fifty chance:

MULRONEY: What he actually said was, "I wouldn't have given this thing a plug nickel." Then he said, "After your speech down here and your efforts, it looks good." And I

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said, "On a scale of one to ten what does it look like?" And he said, "I'd give it a five." Which coming from him was extraordinary.

As he was telling me that on the doorstep of his home in the rain, he had made up his mind to cancel the vote. He's amazing. God, I tell you. In a country where the WASPS have always said a man's word is his bond, it's amazing that a guy would put his signature on a constitutional document wherein he undertakes to do something, and then betrays everything—including the country—and he gets applauded in English Canada for doing it. Nobody would believe that anybody could be that dishonest. No vote. Clyde Wells dishonoured his signature and didn't put it to a vote. There's nothing wrong with losing a vote in a democracy—you like to win, but there's nothing wrong with putting something to a vote and it being defeated. If Meech Lake had been put to a vote in the Newfoundland legislature and had passed, then I think we know the consequences. Today you'd have a united country—not perfectly united, because the separatists would still be around, but you'd have a signed constitutional document, which really would have changed profoundly the way we do business in Canada.

Wells was philosophically opposed to the entire effort: I've long been a proponent of a constituent assembly. Really, when you get down to it, what does it matter what the premiers or the government leaders of the territories and the leaders of the Aboriginal people, what does it matter what they agree on in a room with horse-trading back and forth? It's really academic what the premiers say. What we've got to do is try and build a consensus that has a reasonable prospect of acceptance by the Canadian people. In the end, that's where we are.

The other big stumbling block, Mulroney believed, was Trudeau's ego:

Point of fact, there was nothing wrong with Meech Lake except one thing: Trudeau's vanity. He didn't want anybody to succeed where he had failed. Trudeau's contribution was not to build Canada but to destroy it, and I had to come in and save it. Three times I've achieved unanimity. In sixteen years, he couldn't do it once, the "great statesman." No wonder they're all laughing behind his back around the world. He couldn't even do it at home; you can imagine what they thought of him around the world.

His constitution was done at night in the kitchen. The constitution is supposed to be an instrument of unity. He brought in a constitution that was repudiated by one-third of the population, and one of the two founding peoples. You give away the power of the Supreme Court to become the instrument of law because you give the provincial premiers an override clause, which makes the whole thing meaningless. This concession does not exist anywhere in the civilized world.

Former Liberal cabinet minister Mitchell Sharp offered a counterpunch:

I don't like Meech Lake. I don't think the Canadian interest was well defended during the negotiations. My view of what happened was the prime minister said to all the provinces, "Tell me what you want and I'll get it for you." The purpose of Meech Lake was to make Quebec more distinct than it is now, to differentiate it from the other provinces, to make that a policy. Meech Lake would not prevent the withdrawal of some privileges from the English-speaking in Quebec, and in the rest of the country would not result in very much of an improvement for the French-speaking minority.

Mulroney himself downplayed the significance of the concept of a "distinct society":

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are not given to any other province. It's an interpretive section of the Constitution, the same way that multiculturalism is there, the same way that Aboriginals are there. That's all it is. It's whatever the Supreme Court thinks it is. The distinct society clause, as I said to Wells, "All it means is dick to me. Means dick."

Mulroney was certain there was a conspiracy to kill Meech Lake:

NEWMAN: Was the lawyer Deborah Coyne Trudeau's agent in this?

MULRONEY: Yes, and Trudeau himself. There were conversations between [former Liberal cabinet minister] Don Johnston, directly between Don Johnston and Clyde Wells, Pierre Trudeau and Clyde Wells, and Deborah Coyne.

NEWMAN: Deborah Coyne was then going out with Trudeau?

MULRONEY: That's when she was impregnated.

NEWMAN: Do you draw any connection?

MULRONEY: Yes, that's exactly what happened. They were together, persuading Wells, and Trudeau wound up persuading her and that's where she became pregnant, exactly at that time. That's when the kid was born.

NEWMAN: Well, conceived . . .

MULRONEY: Lysiane Gagnon [the *La Presse* columnist] wrote, "What a disgraceful performance. Only a farcical English Canada could remain unaware of the fact that a conspiracy so bloody blatant that it produced a child is going on to get Meech killed off by Clyde Wells and with no responsibility." And the fact that a former prime

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minister at seventy-three years of age can go out and father a child out of wedlock and have people comment on it approvingly tells you everything you want to know. Like it's kind of an accomplishment for you and I to go out and pick up with somebody overnight, knock her up. This has been going on since the apes.

Clyde Wells, on Trudeau's influence:

I'm not in any manner a disciple of Trudeau. There's not one iota of truth in that. As it turns out, my view of the constitutional structure is quite similar to Mr. Trudeau's . . . but I mean, there's a marked similarity in the views of millions of other Canadians.

NEWMAN: About Meech, Frank Moores told me that if the vote in the legislature had been held, you would have lost . . .

WELLS: No, he's totally wrong, no question whatsoever. The federal government knew it, and John Crosbie knew it. I was committed to having a free vote with no role in trying to persuade people to vote one way or the other, and I didn't tell anybody how I was going to vote. Although anybody who listened to the opinions that I was expressing generally on the issues shouldn't have had any doubt about my personal view. I couldn't hide it. You can't be that dishonest.

Crosbie was there all that day orchestrating the performance of the Opposition and, as things developed in the course of the afternoon, when it became clear what was happening in Manitoba [Elijah Harper's filibuster], I spoke with Crosbie and Lowell Murray, and told them what the situation was. Later that day, we went back into the House to conclude the debate and we adjourned at the request of the Opposition. The leader of the Opposition, Tom Rideout, the government house leader and myself met with Crosbie, told him the way the vote would be,

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and the Opposition agreed that it would be defeated. In the meantime, Murray was saying, "We have time now, we are going to take a reference to the Supreme Court to see if we can roll back the deadline." And here was Newfoundland, having forgone its referendum that it wanted to hold because of time pressures. Now, all of a sudden, they have time to accommodate Manitoba, yet they didn't have time to accommodate Newfoundland.

But that wasn't the telling factor. What I said to Crosbie was if the vote is taken, you know and understand it will be defeated. Now, what will be achieved with Manitoba having already failed to support it? It can't pass because it has to have unanimous approval. So it's dead in the water as of now. If we can get the Supreme Court to agree, by that time maybe you might be able to change more minds and you might be able to get it approved, but if a vote is taken now, it will be defeated. Now, what's going to be achieved by Newfoundland causing an affront to Quebec by rejecting it? If you're right about the Supreme Court, then I suggest we adjourn this debate so that a vote can always be taken—if you solve the problem in Manitoba. And we can bring it back. But if you go now, be assured that it will be defeated. Why don't you get the prime minister to agree that the sensible thing to do would be to defer the vote in Newfoundland until you resolve this problem with Manitoba and if you do, then we can bring it back?

So he went to the prime minister, and he would agree with Newfoundland adjourning the debate to allow time for the matter to be resolved in Manitoba, but only on one condition: that I personally express my support for Meech Lake. How do you live with that? I couldn't live with it. I can't operate that way. It would be fundamentally dishonest. I didn't support what was in it, and I couldn't sell my soul that way. The prime minister thought it was appropriate to pressure me to do that.

So we adjourned the debate anyway and that's what

we did—it wasn't voted against: the motion was still on the Order Paper, and could have been brought back had they resolved the problem in Manitoba. Even if I had made that declaration, it wouldn't have done any good, but it would have made me look like eighty-four kinds of a fool and I couldn't do that. I'd sooner resign than have done that.

Trudeau advisor Michael Pitfield thought Mulroney should look to his own government:

I don't believe Trudeau prompted Wells to do anything—I think Mr. Wells did his own thing. He had his views and he used Deborah Coyne, who was a common link with Trudeau, a better link than some of us thought. He and Trudeau found common cause together.

If the government had handled Meech with more skill, they would have succeeded. If they had proceeded quickly and with dispatch, instead of leaving this thing on the table. If the government had sought to include in and reached out, instead of taking all the glory itself. If they had tried to dispel in their documentation some of the contradictions in the document itself. If they had not locked the premiers away from their advisors all the time, including at the end, they would have had premiers who understood what they were signing. We had two or three premiers saying right afterwards they didn't understand what they had signed. Manitoba's Howard Pawley had no idea.

Stanley Hartt agreed with him:

Meech Lake was the crowning achievement of Brian's negotiating technique. The one mistake he made was that he didn't say, "Now, the Constitution says there are three years to ratify. We're not going to take three years to ratify—too much time for opposition to build up. Some of you guys might get defeated and change your minds. Let's agree on an order, and I don't care if we bunch the order,

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Hanging Louis Riel all over again:

MULRONEY: I'm discouraged by the fact that we had the sweetest deal ever known to man and it was thrown away. I'm discouraged for Canada because I know what's going to happen with these vain, stupid people in a short period of time. There's a televised picture of Chrétien at the Calgary leadership convention, where he hugged Clyde Wells for killing the Meech Lake Accord. That was the modern equivalent of hugging Macdonald for hanging Louis Riel. This is like the hanging of Louis Riel on videotape. "Thank you, Clyde, for all your work." This is like sitting back and watching the boys hang Louis Riel.

Mulroney found Wells's attitude mind-boggling:

Could I have known what Wells was going to do? It's like somebody saying, well, I suspect that this Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh down in the United States is a killer. You might've suspected that, but until you've seen him blow up the building, you had no reason to think that the guy was really going to do that.

He believed all the blame should be laid at Wells's doorstep:

Aboriginals are not to blame for Meech's failure, despite Elijah Harper's stupidity. I said to my caucus, "I don't want anybody blaming the Aboriginals. How can you blame people whose lands were taken away from them, whose lives are infected with prostitution and drunkenness, malnutrition, lack of opportunity, all of this inflicted on them by the industrialized society? How can you go out and blame them?" I was very emotional because they were ready to rush out and lynch them, all because of Elijah Harper's stupidity. He turned down a sweetheart deal.

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Ontario premier David Peterson was even more vituperative than Mulroney:

I know Clyde well. I'm going to tell you, he is the most arrogant son of a bitch I've ever met in my life, as in "I'm right and you're wrong." We spent a week with the bastard, and the whole discussion was convincing Clyde. He would never admit it, but he's wrong in law and he's wrong in politics. The tragedy is that we were that close.

John Crosbie:

I didn't think the Meech Lake Accord ever had a chance of passing once Wells got elected. I knew he had this fetish about Meech Lake, although it wasn't a big issue in the provincial election. I've known Clyde for a long time and he's like a dog with a bone. Once he has an opinion, it never changes, never varies. People were mad because Mulroney said something about Newfoundland being a small province, come into Confederation late or something like this, and surely it shouldn't hold up the unanimity approving this Meech Lake Accord. But the person who destroyed Meech Lake was Clyde Wells.

Mulroney, ruminating obsessively on Wells:

I'm staying away from the argument on Meech Lake, which is "I told you so." It's very interesting—the Maritime premiers now have cut Wells out of their action. I personally just can't stand to be in the room with him. He's the most unprincipled guy. You know, all politicians take liberties. That's the nature of the beast, getting kicked around and trying to get things done in an imperfect system. And I've run into a fair amount of it and have probably contributed a small amount myself, but nothing has ever compared to the lack of principle of this son of a bitch.

But, according to Stanley Hartt, Mulroney held no long-term grudge:

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The accusation is made constantly: "He's punishing Aboriginal peoples for Elijah Harper having blocked Meech Lake." That isn't true and it really hurts him. The credibility issue is not an ego thing—this is not him wanting to be thought well of. He isn't the kind of person who would say, in the case of Newfoundland because of what Clyde Wells did, "Not a red cent for those bastards."

Senator Lowell Murray on the impact of the Meech rejection:

It was the last chance we had to keep the old Canada and try to build on it. Mulroney's metaphor of the bridge was very apt. Like him, I never saw Meech Lake as a solution to a problem, I saw it as a bridge. If we could put it in place, then you've got the status quo for a certain time and you've got some breathing space over that time to evolve and to work out perhaps somewhat different arrangements, but in a completely different context.

Had Meech Lake passed, then Quebec would have become one of ten at the table and whatever new constitutional demands she might have would have to be worked out with us and with the other provinces. Now Quebec is isolated again, and her minimal conditions have been turned down.

At the time, Mulroney foresaw serious consequences:
You're going to be confronting a referendum in between ten and fifteen years, and the night before the referendum takes place, when the whole country is holding its breath, the elements of the Meech Lake Accord are going to look very reasonable indeed.

Five years later, on the eve of the Quebec referendum in 1995, Mulroney predicted revenge against Chrétien:
In the 1980 Quebec referendum, we had a message: "Vote No and we are going to deliver a new constitution." Now, in 1995, Jean Chrétien is the prime minister, with very

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little credibility in Quebec and he's sinking fast. We have no message, because the message last time was believe us, stick with us and we'll give you a constitution of which you can be proud. They wound up with a constitution that they wouldn't sign. Chrétien, who played an active role in sabotaging Meech, would have been enormously better off as the prime minister of Canada to have Meech, to have it done and to be able to say, "This is what Canada stands for."

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The Perils of People Power

IF THE SECRET OF GOVERNING Canada is deciding which touchy issues to leave alone, Brian Mulroney was a dud—and never more so than during his final attempt to set new rules of engagement between Quebec and the rest of the country. The Great Referendum, held under his feverish sponsorship on October 26, 1992, was supposed to decide the country's constitutional future. Instead, it decided his.

The popular vote against the Charlottetown Accord set the stage for his exit from politics a few months later. Charlottetown faced the handicap of being the third in a series of constitutional showdowns, following the Trudeau patriation pageant of 1982 (which most voters had forgotten) and the fiasco of the Meech Lake agreement (which they didn't want to remember). At a time when unemployment was running at a devastating

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11 per cent and the economy was ravaged by uncertainty, tinkering with the constitution didn't rank on anybody's list of high-priority items. When one provincial premier warned that if the accord wasn't passed the economy would be devastated, I remember wondering, "How will he be able to tell?"

Unlike Meech, which all but two provincial premiers regarded as a mutual triumph they shared with the prime minister, the Charlottetown meetings had an air of desperation from the very beginning. The eventual accord was the compromise of many compromises, with seventeen designated negotiating chefs concocting a brew that contained only those ingredients on which they could all agree. At one point, a Saskatchewan cabinet minister named Robert Mitchell spoke for most of the delegates to the Prince Edward Island capital where the final version of the accord was negotiated when he sourly commented, "My friend George Peacock, who is in our delegation, leaned over to me yesterday, and said, 'The truth of the matter is that we were all killed in a huge car accident. And this is Hell.' And he was right."

In the referendum campaign that followed, the "Yes" side was never able to demonstrate that the accord delivered the proper balance between individual and collective rights and that the courts could be counted on to protect both. On the contrary, Charlottetown's "distinct society" Quebec clause and the self-government provisions for Aboriginal Canadians made it appear that Canada was developing into a multinational state with more than one class of citizenship. This was particularly true of Quebec, which was guaranteed a perpetual 25 per cent of the seats in the Commons.

There were good reasons for both supporting and rejecting the accord, but they were so complicated that most Canadians shifted their attention to reviling the deal's author. (My own position was that I preferred Meech to Charlottetown, but I actively supported the

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Any voters Mulroney had failed to alienate with his recently passed and highly unpopular goods and services tax and the still negatively perceived Free Trade Agreement were now granted a chance to vote against him, and they lined up to seize the opportunity. "In the course of a referendum, people do not answer a government's question," French president François Mitterrand had pointed out, having learned that lesson the hard way in his own run-off. "They answer the questions they are asking themselves."

Four years after endowing Brian Mulroney with a second majority mandate, voters were desperate to send him a message, echoing the heartbreak Chicago blues, "I Told You I Loved You, Now Get OUT!" Mulroney had characteristically claimed too much for the accord's acceptance (2.5 million new jobs) and exaggerated the effect of its failure (a busted country). The defining image of the referendum debate, which raged across the boardrooms and the taverns of the nation, was of the PM afire at a hall in Sherbrooke, Quebec, where he had been listing thirty-one benefits that that province had achieved through Confederation. He interrupted himself, picked up his speaking notes and tore them in half, then declared, his mouth twisted in anger, "If we vote 'no' we rip up these historic gains!" In the same speech he predicted that a vote against the accord would mean "the beginning of the process of the dismantling of Canada."

The real meaning of the referendum became clear only when people realized that they didn't have to use their ballots to pass judgment on a legalistic arrangement they could barely comprehend. By voting "no!" they could legitimize their mistrust of the politicians who acted as their surrogates in constitutional decisions. This pushed the "yes" side into appearing to defend the status quo, which put its supporters in an increasingly untenable

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position. They were actually fronting revolutionary and creative reforms of the Constitution, but they were cornered into appearing to defend the status quo because of their support of its sponsor.¹

Referendum night in Canada, 1992, signalled open season on incumbents. The "yes" faction, which included nearly every head of anything that mattered (except the Reform Party) and just about every opinion leader in the country, spent \$14 million on its campaign; it had nine hundred professional organizers in the field and the best polling brains money could buy. The "no" side raised much less than a million dollars and campaigned through radio phone-in shows (notably Rafe Mair's passionate invocations on CKNW in Vancouver), fax machines, church basements and leaflets dropped in mailboxes. They became the equivalent of the guerrilla fighters in black pyjamas who won the Vietnam War against the might of the high-tech American killing machine. "The trouble was," Jeffrey Simpson noted in the *Globe*, "that tolerance and compromise had long since yielded to a seething mass of regional, class, ethnic and linguistic passions, usually directed against other parts of Canada."

At the end of that long and agonizing process, both Canada and Brian Mulroney took on some of the characteristics of a beached whale: immobile and beginning to stink a little.

Mulroney, on why he tried:

After the Bélanger-Campeau report [recommending a referendum on Quebec sovereignty], there was a lot of

1. Previous Canadian prime ministers had avoided referenda, with only two exceptions: in 1889 on prohibition and in 1942 on wartime conscription. Both proved inconclusive.

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uncertainty about the future of the country. There was pressure on Robert Bourassa, and he gave in with this undertaking that there was going to be a referendum of some kind on sovereignty before October 26, 1992. So this psychologically was the litmus point.

With the economy the way it was, I became very pre-occupied by this. I didn't mind a referendum on Canada, but if there was going to be a referendum on Canada, I wanted it to be with Canada having an opportunity to put its best face forward. You don't want people voting against Canada because they can't get a job or because the recession has impacted their family and their kids can't find summer employment and therefore they can't go to junior college. This happens in a recession. So there were a number of reasons why it was important to seek a resolution.

Mulroney shuffled his cabinet, placing Joe Clark in charge of dealing with the provinces:

I put Clark in Constitutional Affairs because I needed somebody at this point in time who was bilingual, who had not been sullied by the attacks and counterattacks of Meech and post-Meech. Clark had been totally out of the fray for seven years. It was almost as if Clark weren't a Canadian because [as minister of external affairs] he wasn't part of the everyday fighting. When he took a position on something, it was generally a position that the nation supported.

While preparing to lead the "Yes" side in the referendum, Mulroney reflected on what Canada might become without a new constitutional deal:

I might do a speech where I refer to these predictions by futurologists that the Canadian fragments would be swept up by the United States. To put things in perspective, California has a larger economy than that of Canada in terms of influence. So there would be no discussions or

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bargaining—provinces would enter on a take-it-or-leave-it basis.

So you've got the nine provinces of English Canada coming in with the equivalent of about 22 million people, and that's substantially less than the population of one state. You'd eventually find yourself with the same kinds of crime rates and the right to bear arms in your new constitution. You wouldn't have to worry about western alienation. The concept would disappear from our vocabulary, because you'd be a member of the melting pot. And Albertans, seeking to do business with their fellow Americans in California by mid next century, will probably have to deal in Spanish, and may—horror of horrors—find Spanish on the side of their cornflakes box.

Mulroney thought the Charlottetown agreement confirmed the original contents of the Meech Lake Accord: The only memorable quote I ever heard from my father was, "You can never go wrong doing the right thing." And what I was doing with Meech was the right thing. Now the proof of that, if you ever wanted proof, is that, aside from a couple of little changes, every single item and word of Meech Lake was in the Charlottetown document.

He worried about how to get the terms across to Quebec:

René Lévesque's politicization of the teachers' union left them much more interested in propagating separatism than in teaching their students how to write French. If these people can't read, what do we do so they get the message? . . . We've got to put our message on television in a very simple, straightforward way. No use putting dancing girls on, trumpets and so on, just put it on in black and white: here are the gains Bourassa achieved at Charlottetown. And then have a voice-over as it rolls, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven . . . Just as if you were

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On the west coast, Mulroney envisioned a different publicity strategy:

In British Columbia, I suggested to our people not just to assemble but also to do direct advertising. Say something like, "Ladies and gentlemen, you may not have known—may we introduce you to the leaders of the 'No' side in Quebec?" And flash on a picture of Jacques Parizeau and Lucien Bouchard. "Do you know how they are going to interpret a 'No' win in Quebec? They say as soon as they get a 'No' vote, they're going to take Quebec out and destroy Canada. You may not have known this, but these are the people who are working for the 'No' side."

Mulroney, on the unlikely coalition that came together to reject the deal:

Look at the "No" side. Can you imagine being associated with a group that involved people like Trudeau and Judy Rebick—a Trotskyite—and [Parti Québécois leader] Jacques Parizeau and Danny Cameron, the leader of the Confederation of Regions Party in New Brunswick? And Preston Manning? The malice of a Sharon Carstairs in full flight, when she is not complaining of nervous breakdowns and her possible imminent withdrawals from politics because of stress, is a sight to behold.

This campaign is tough, because if you say anything, they say it's fear-mongering. If you say nothing, they say, "Jesus! Hey, Prime Minister, why didn't you warn us?" I fully expected all the rats to come out, and they have. The press, the wimps like Manning, the haters like Trudeau, the destroyers like Parizeau and his gang. Canadians are going to have to decide very, very soon whether they want to keep the country together. Just that simple.

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Some pundits thought he should step aside and let someone else lead the constitutional battle:

MULRONEY: When this thing started, I could have gone to Harrington Lake or Florida and said, "Look, if you need me, give me a call." And then they would say, what a coward, he does this deal and he's not even ready to fight for it, what kind of a leader is this?

I'm out there fighting away, which is what I should be doing. And I get these stupid, sophomoric editorials from [pollster] Angus Reid saying that I'm dragging the cause down and that Joe Clark should be leading the fight. But it never occurs to Angus to ask himself, if Joe Clark is so popular, how come we're way behind in Alberta, where I haven't set foot?

The other thing I find quite funny, just between us, is that everybody is gearing up all the so-called experts to blame me. But you know the fact of the matter is that by the time I got to British Columbia on the first leg of the campaign, they were calling this guy Mike Harcourt "Premier Bonehead." By the time we get to Alberta, Don Getty has resigned, thereby ensuring that the Conservative Party is not supporting the "Yes" side—they're all running for leader. When I get to Manitoba, Filmon is still in Europe. In Newfoundland, Clyde Wells spends the first three weeks arguing about the legal text, deciding whether or not he's going to come. And in Quebec, Robert Bourassa has been betrayed and blindsided by everybody from the tapes in *L'actualité* [in which two renegade bureaucrats blamed Bourassa for caving to English Canada] to a stab in the back by Pierre Trudeau, who calls him a blackmailer.

And a simplistic mind like Angus Reid is saying the "Yes" side didn't plan its campaign. How was I supposed to plan for this?

Mulroney believed Charlottetown was a crossroads:
Fifty years later, people will say, you know, how did these

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people manage to lose Canada? How did they do something like that?

The answer is that when confronted with a challenge, Canadians failed to respond. And what was the challenge? Were they challenged to find a cure for cancer? No. Were they challenged to end poverty in the world? No. Were they challenged to put a man on Mars? No, nothing that dramatic.

Canadians failed to agree on language that would have enabled the country to survive while, for example, building a new Senate like the Germans and the Australians did, or redistributing powers between the federal and provincial levels, as goes on all the time, or strengthening the constitutional position and distinctiveness of its French-speaking minority in Quebec, or innovating a defined and appropriate degree of justice and fairness in constitutional and economic terms for our Native people.

He couldn't help resenting the fact that the media downplayed his efforts to make the accord work: I brought Bourassa back, just through personal relationships . . . He didn't want to come back and then I got him to come back to Harrington Lake and we just kept working it through and finally we got the deal, right?

In the seven weeks since I've been involved, I think most people—and I certainly know what they're saying privately—agree that I salvaged the whole thing. In fact, Clark is saying it quite openly; he's saying it very openly. We were dead and this guy walked in and he resurrected the whole goddamned thing. All the premiers are saying it, but not a single solitary person in Ottawa has written it. This is what I'm up against.

Seven weeks after the prime minister for the first time since Sir John A. Macdonald does this—this is my third time, but this time even the Aboriginal peoples are in there, and the territorial leaders. I do it, and there's not a

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goddamned word. My name is not mentioned except to disparage me.

Public opinion polls began to suggest a defeat for the "Yes" side:

MULRONEY: I got off the plane the other day in Winnipeg and I said to Jake Epp, "How are we doing?" He said, "We're doing fine, we're working hard. It's a very, very tough fight. The enemy is anti-French, anti-Quebec." You know what could happen? We could have a repeat of the John Major phenomenon, where all of these highly respected polling organizations the day before the UK election predicted that Labour leader Neil Kinnock would win, and the next day the Tories won a majority. At the last second, people went for Major. If that were to happen, we could wind up certainly winning the popular vote in Canada and most provinces.

On October 26, 1992, six provinces rejected the deal, with the highest rejection rate coming from British Columbia:

We did the right thing with Charlottetown. We did the right thing by putting it to a referendum, no question about that. I have no trouble with Charlottetown—they voted on it. I don't care what people decide as long as they vote. I haven't the slightest regret about the referendum, not one. It was a great opportunity missed. A great opportunity missed . . .

Trudeau advisor Michael Pitfield on why Canadians rejected it:

Charlottetown was overworked. Nobody could understand it. If there ever was a case of Jeffersonian justification, the people spoke against what it was. With \$7 million funding on the "Yes" side and about \$190,000 on the other, they went with the \$190,000. It doesn't really matter that it was an unholy coalition—various interest

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groups were each unhappy for different reasons, some of which were contradictory.

Mulroney later rationalized the referendum defeat:

We had to deal, quite properly, with Aboriginal concerns and institutional reform, as a result of which a fairly complicated package had to be put together. The referendum was interesting and beneficial, because it took the poison out of the system for Quebec. It laid something out; the Canadian people had a chance to say yes or no to it. They said no to it, but not in overwhelming terms.

Generally speaking this thing was 45-55 across the country—four or five provinces in favour, four or five provinces against it. But it was rejected. And having rejected it, Canadians moved on. The package had to be put democratically to the people. It was, and they said No. I don't think there are any winners or losers in that. When the people speak, they are always right. They have spoken on this.

CONCLUSION

Mulroney Redux

Out of the unguarded comments in this book emerges the portrait of an elastic politician with touches of grace and the balls of a canal horse.

HIS EYES WERE SHINY that night in the fierce autumn of 1992 when the Charlottetown Accord was relegated to the ashcan of history. At first I mistook the gleam in Brian Mulroney's eyes for excitement. Then I realized they were brimming with tears that he hadn't allowed to fall. His humiliations in the battles of Meech and Charlottetown were the bitter beads of his rosary: the death of his dream that he could best Trudeau in the constitutional wars.

It was October 26, 1992, and Mulroney had invited me to his prime ministerial retreat at Harrington Lake so that I could share with his innermost circle the results of the constitutional referendum. From the outside, the PM's rural sanctuary is just another old farmhouse in the Gatineau hills; on odd occasions, hikers, snowshoers and cross-country skiers still stumble on the property to ask for directions.

Mila's deft decorating touches had created a cozy ambience, wrapping guests and residents in a warm, pine-scented and beeswaxed aura of serenity. The main floor's focal point was a stone fireplace that could accommodate entire tree trunks.

The guest list that evening was limited to Deputy Prime Minister Don Mazankowski, Health Minister Benoît Bouchard, Chief of Staff Hugh Segal, prime ministerial confidants Senator Lowell Murray and future senator Marjory LeBreton, PC strategist John Tory and the Mulroneys' personal assistant, Michael McSweeney.

"What's the difference between George Bush and God?" Mark, the second youngest of the Mulroney children, asked the assembled bigwigs. Then he answered his own question: "God doesn't think he's George Bush!"

"Now, now, Mark," Mulroney cautioned his son, then turned to the rest of us to announce, "Mark's the best slapshot in the business. I'm going to trade him to the Leafs." He was interrupted by the appearance on CBC-TV of Deborah Coyne, the mother of Trudeau's love child, who had become one of Mulroney's severest critics.

Benoît Bouchard shouted, "Turn it to *The Simpsons!*"

"I don't like them either," Mulroney glumly replied. He sat in a corner, wearing a green sweater, nervously picking at the palms of his hands. The most telling sign of internal stress was always the state of Mulroney's palms. At the start of every interview, I would glance at his hands to determine his mental state. Often bloodied by his nervous habit of picking them raw, that evening his palms resembled those of Mel Gibson's Christ.

He cautioned that it would be a bad omen for the rest of the country if the Yes side wasn't five points ahead in Halifax. When the early Nova Scotia results started coming in, swinging decisively against the accord, somebody said, "Do they realize it's hard to take them seriously?"—to which Mulroney replied, "There may have been an expensive buyout in Nova Scotia tonight." Referring to the government's bridge project to Prince Edward Island,

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Hugh Segal sourly quipped, "The fixed link may have to stretch a little further. It will have to be extended."

Nicolas, the baby of the Mulroney family, arrived home just then from a karate lesson and did a quick demonstration, flattening his laughing father on the floor. As Mulroney got up again, the first indecisive Ontario results appeared on the screen. "There'll be no miracles, tonight," he predicted.

Unexpectedly, dinner (scampi and chicken) was announced and we sat down at a long table, Brian at one end, Mila at the other. By eight-thirty, the decidedly adverse results from Quebec began to show up. "The loss of Meech cost us 10 per cent," Mulroney speculated. "Trudeau's betrayal, another 10 per cent. That was why so many switched. My surveys show we will lose the province by 25 per cent."

Twenty-five minutes later, the TV was reporting a 50-50 split in the province. "It doesn't make you proud to be a Canadian," Mulroney lamented. "In 1984, we got the largest majority, yet half have now voted against us." After Quebec's polls had closed in a decisive renunciation of the Charlottetown agreement, Bloc Québécois Leader Lucien Bouchard came on to crow that the vote had really been about sovereignty and that his cause had been significantly advanced. To which an angry Benoît Bouchard retorted: "I can tell you, *les Québécois* are not separatists."

"They are now," Mila quietly replied.

Nobody said anything until the province's final results had been tabulated: 42.4% per cent in support; 55.4% per cent against.

"Forty-two to fifty-five—a big victory," Mulroney sarcastically observed.

"Aren't you sweet," Mila replied, not smiling. "You've been a Quebec Conservative too long."

As the bad news from Manitoba rolled in, Marjory LeBreton blurted out, "They haven't changed since they hanged Riel!"

"If I went to bed now," Mila glumly speculated, "perhaps when I wake up, we would have won." She was on a crutch with a badly sprained ankle.

"You know, it might be worth a try," John Tory chimed in.

Mulroney nixed the fantasy: "I don't think so."

By 10 p.m., nothing was slowing the slide. The only distinctive voice on the Yes side was the dignified statement by Aboriginal leader Ron George, saying the opportunity for self-government had been needlessly wasted. "You've kept apartheid alive and well in Canada," he warned.

The final referendum verdict was 44.6% per cent Yes and 54.4% per cent No. Nearly eight million Canadians had rejected the deal.

"I'd rather be with Ron George than Preston Manning, who is in the same camp as Doug Christie [the lawyer who defended most of Canada's Nazis], and Pierre Trudeau," Mulroney declared. Then he paused for a long moment before adding, "For that matter, I'd rather be back in Baie-Comeau, driving a truck. But Mila wouldn't like it."

Mila sat up and, in her sweetest sarcastic tone, asked, "Would that cover tuition costs at Harvard?"

"What is the heart of Canada?" Mulroney mused. "The amount of bigotry and hatred in this country is astonishing. I remember Bob Rae [then NDP premier of Ontario] saying that he would never forgive Trudeau for legitimizing the anti-French bigots. I've got a lot of time for that guy—he's very principled." In defeat, the prime minister's voice was flat, lacking its usual wit and cadence. Somewhere deep inside him the close-knit fabric of his life must have been coming apart.

Mark reappeared. "My dad is too good for Canadians," he announced. "They don't deserve him."

Mila nodded, then said to no one in particular, "I don't know how Brian does it. How he has the stomach for this."