

Mulroney

The Making of the Prime Minister



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September 4, 1984

By the time the television networks came on air in the East at eight o'clock they were ready to make the call. There were three television sets on in the Mulroney headquarters, but it was the one in the corner that caught the attention of Brian Mulroney and his aides. On the CBC, Peter Mansbridge was announcing a majority Conservative government.

"How do you feel?" Mulroney was asked as the Tory wave swept through the East.

"I feel fine," he said in a low voice. He also felt genuinely humbled.

He was at the end of one road, and the beginning of another. But something he had said before the 1983 leadership campaign came back now. "One thing I've learned," he said then, "and that's how to keep my eye on the ball. It's going to take me all the way to 24 Sussex Drive."

So he had. And so it did. The electrician's son had long sought and finally won the highest office in the land. He was home, at last.

In this, the first full-length biography of Brian Mulroney, and the only one for which the Progressive Conservative leader has granted full access to himself and his advisers, respected Montreal political columnist Ian MacDonald recounts the fascinating life story of the man who has single-handedly changed the face of Canadian politics.

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"Steve," Mulroney said, fixing him with one of those cocky blue-eyed stares, "you're lookin' right fuckin' at him."

At that point, Mulroney may well have been moving to the front of the pack. From a swing on the DH-125 through northern Ontario earlier that week, the *Globe and Mail's* national columnist, Geoffrey Stevens, had gathered enough material for three pieces in the bottom left-hand corner of his paper's editorial page, known in the trade as the choicest piece of real estate in Canadian journalism.

In the second column that had appeared on that Friday morning of January 16, the headline had proclaimed that Mulroney was "A Strong Contender." "He has a quality which is difficult to describe," Stevens wrote. "It's a quality of reasonableness, an ability to convince people he shares their opinions, even when he doesn't. He does this without shading or slanting his own views to suit those of others, without blunting his opinions, without making them so bland as to be universally acceptable and universally meaningless." Stevens concluded:

When you get right down to it, there is no discernible philosophical difference between Brian Mulroney and Robert Stanfield. Both men know there are no simple answers to complex questions. Mr. Mulroney is more articulate, more persuasive. And he has that way of making people believe he shares their views when, through his reasonableness, he has led them to share his. A handy asset for a would-be national leader.

Mulroney's reaction, reading this on the plane on the way down from Montreal, was entirely predictable. "This," he said, waving his folded copy of the *Globe and Mail*, "is great stuff." He would be less enchanted by the third instalment in the next day's Saturday paper, when the journalist would discern something faintly presumptuous about the boy from Baie Comeau flitting around in a private jet, asking his friend and aide Stephen Leopold for "a cigarette, please."

Mulroney got out of Toronto on Saturday by the skin of his teeth. At a meeting of Metro women delegates he was reminded that Toronto considers itself the policy capital of the world, when a woman asked him about his science policy. His rather lame reply was that Canada was research-poor and needed more research and development, a theme he would know more about when he raised it himself in the 1983 leadership campaign. In answer to another question on how to curb government waste, he suggested it wouldn't hurt to mothball a few government jets.

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By as early as 1956, Mulroney had become an important actor in Canadian politics, and the Conservative Party specifically. That year the brush-cutted seventeen-year-old St. Francis Xavier University sophomore travelled to the Tory's federal convention in Ottawa as the national vice-chairman of Youth for Dief.

MacDonald traces Mulroney's meteoric rise to power from his university days at St. Francis Xavier and Laval, where he became friends with Quebec premiers Jean Lesage and Daniel Johnson (who used to refer to him as "l'irlandais - the Irish kid"), through to his term as a member of the Cliche Commission, where the pinstriped Tory who spoke colloquial French first captured the imagination of Canadians. As well as covering both of Mulroney's Tory leadership campaigns, MacDonald travelled with the candidate during the 1984 election campaign, and was the only reporter with Mulroney as he watched the historic returns on election night.

MacDonald has known Mulroney since 1972. Over the years they have had hundreds of conversations; and for this book six long interviews and two long background discussions were conducted, covering topics from Mulroney's early days in Baie Comeau to his vision of a new Canada.

Here is the definitive biography of Canada's eighteenth Prime Minister, a revealing study of the man on whom the future of Canada depends.

Ian MacDonald has been political columnist with the *Montreal Gazette* since 1977. He is also the author of *From Bourassa to Bourassa*, a narrative history of the referendum era in Quebec.

ISBN: 0-7710-5469-6

Jacket Design: Marie Bartholomew

Front Jacket Photograph: Brian Willer

Author Photo: Fred Chartrand: CP Ottawa, Toronto

McClelland and Stewart Limited
The Canadian Publishers