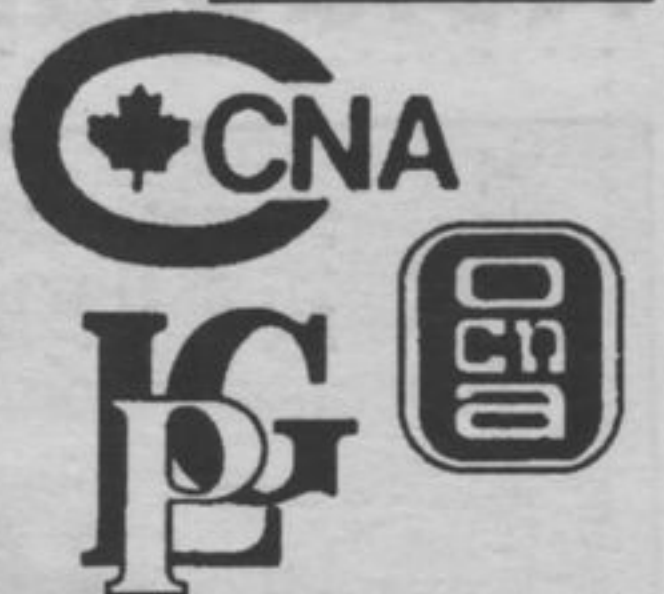


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## Canada a bargain? Fire sale underway at the federal store

To TV sitcom fans, the scene is familiar enough: as the opening credits roll for the series *Married, with children*, Al Bundy, shoe salesman and all-around lousy father, stares off into the distance as his lecherous family greedily snaps up his paycheque, which he hands out with a sad resignation. Even the dog gets into the act, grabbing a sawbuck between his teeth before the gravy train runs out.

Kind of reminds you of Canada's so-called Unity Minister, giving out any and all federal goodies he can, hoping to fill the insatiable appetite of the premiers and any other special interest groups who smell blood.

Lately, I have tried as hard as possible not to think about the constitution, because I am sick, sick *sick* of hearing about it. But lately, the whole process has taken an ominous turn. Can any reasonably intelligent person comprehend the idea that our country may go down the long slide because of a dispute over the Senate? The *Senate*?

Last time I checked, the place of sober second thought was basically a retirement home for political partisans who had outlived their usefulness and had nowhere else to go. Former Nova Scotia Premier John Bucanen comes to mind.

The real counterbalance to the House of Commons has traditionally been the premiers. Even during the dark and destructive years of Pierre Trudeau, the provincial premiers wielded considerably more power than, for example, the governors of the United States. Just like in the American Senate, which Clyde Wells and Don Getty seem so enamoured with these days, each province has equal representation—one Premier.

That the Premier of Ontario has more power than the Premier of Prince Edward Island is undeniable, but remember, it was the Premier of Manitoba and, more than anybody, the Premier of Newfoundland that killed Meech Lake. Together, those two provinces have about ten per cent of the population.

So what do we need an elected and more powerful Senate for? What good would it do anybody? Unless the premiers are willing to relinquish their role in national affairs—and I wouldn't even bet my toe jam collection on that—a Senate with teeth will only make the labourious process of getting anything done in this frustrating country more maddening and even more subject to political machinations.

The sad part of this dark period in Canadian history is that if Quebec and Ontario were willing to go along with a triple E senate, the Federal Government would jump for joy at getting any kind of deal, and eagerly accept.

As it is, the constitutional agreement that is slowly taking shape is going to make our poor country ungovernable, and our central government a neutered version of its former self. Never did I think that the premiers of this country would sink so low as they have now, reducing themselves to regional warlords, looting the federal store for all its worth before throwing it away without a thought for the consequences.

Don Getty wants the new senate so badly because of the National Energy Program the Liberals inflicted on the west in the early part of the last decade; Newfoundland has many axes to grind with Quebec over hydroelectric power; Quebec has so many grievances against the rest of Canada that its licence plates reads "Je me souviens"; and so on and on.

"Happy is the country that has no history," wrote the historian. Canada has too much history, and is in real danger of making a whole lot more.



## A sucker's born every minute

A chap by the name of Phineas Taylor Barnum uttered that observation more than a century ago. P.T.'s philosophical conclusion was based on a lifetime of watching the rubes line up to get in his world-famous circus. Barnum discovered that people would pay to see just about anything, as long as it was served up with a good gob of showmanship. When the famous Cardiff Giant was "discovered", Barnum immediately tried to buy it for display in his circus. The owners turned him down. Undeterred, Barnum hired a sculptor to carve another Cardiff Giant. He did, and Barnum pitched a tent over it and started selling tickets. In no time, Barnum's fake of a fake was attracting more customers than the original.

P.T. Barnum is dead now. He died in 1891. I know because I checked. I checked because I was beginning to think that old P.T. was alive and well and working out of the Prime Minister's Office in Ottawa.

Have you noticed the oh, so subtle sales job that's been done on our PM of late? It started around the beginning of 1992, if I'm not mistaken -- which, co-incidentally enough, is about the time Hugh Segal was hired as chief Image Masseur for the PM.

Gradually, kinder, gentler stories and photos about Mulroney began to appear. Here was Brian stooping to pick up a swooning female Mountie. There was Brian commiserating with the widow Jeanne Sauve at the funeral of her husband.

I'm not suggesting that the Mountie took a dive, or that Mulroney didn't feel real compassion for Madame Sauve. I'm merely pointing out that both photos landed on the front pages of an awful lot of the nation's newspapers. And they were the kind of photos that a press agent has wet dreams about.

Is that you behind the curtain, Hughie?

It's not just the newspapers either. Did you catch that televised Love-in Brian and Mila did with Hana Gartner? One full hour of prime

time lob balls in which Brian (wisely) let Mila do most of the talking while he sat in his Perry Como sweater, awshucksing softly in the background.

This is a major cosmetic makeover. The task is to take the most roundly loathed public figure in Canadian history and transform him into something...human.

And there's not much time. The Mulroney Mandate is finally running out. Very soon the Prime Minister is going to have to look at a calendar and pick a date for the next federal election.

So the PMO spin doctors are getting their licks while they can. And doing a pretty good job too, considering what they've got to work with. After Mulroney's last visit to Washington, the papers were full of headline adjectives like "blunt" and "forceful". George Bush (a man all too aware of the necessity of heavy makeup) obliged his ole fishin' buddy with the hoary

Whitehouse humble routine -- the one that goes "Boy, that Mister Mulroney sure did give me some talking to, I'll tell ya."

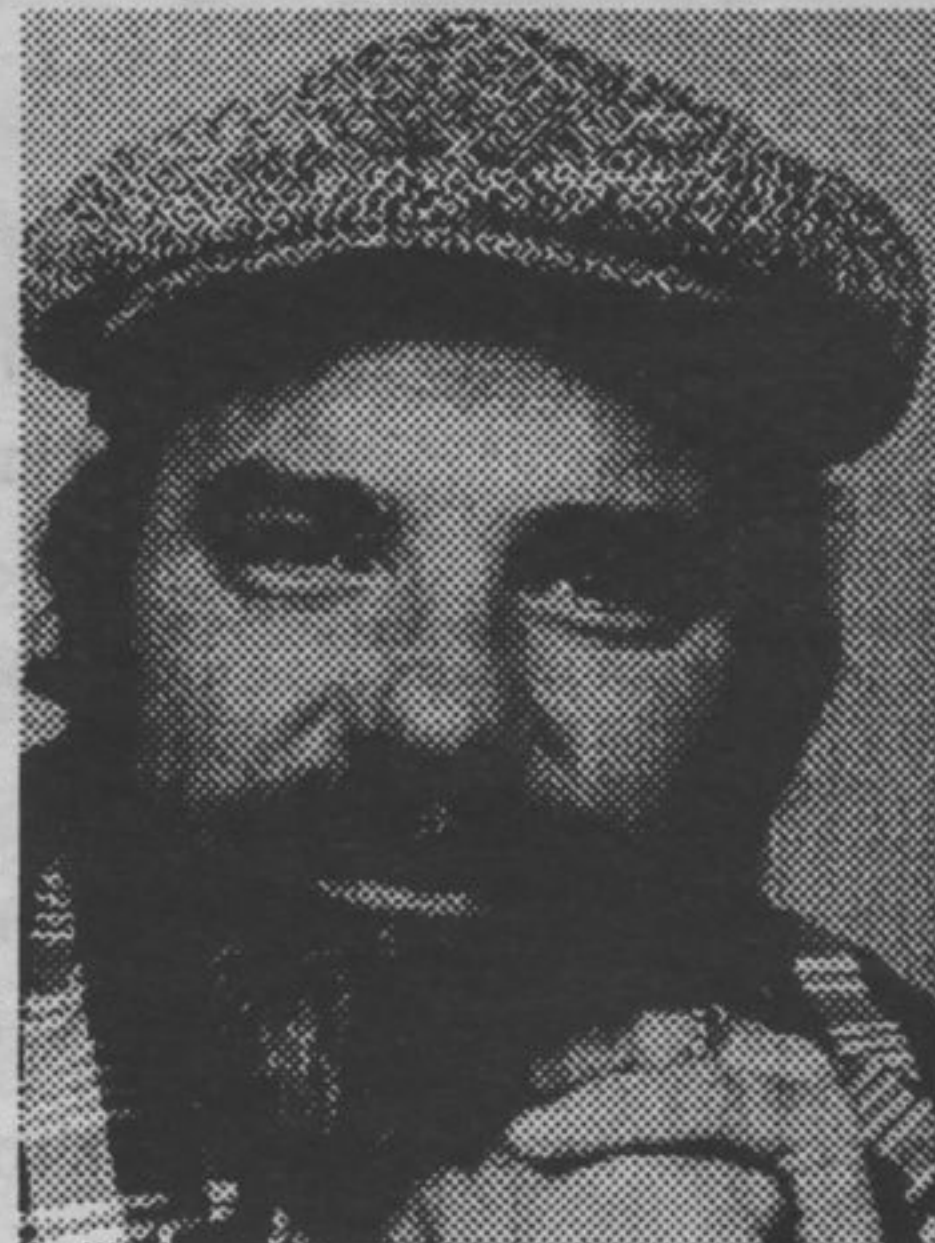
It was perfect politics on both sides. Everybody looks good. Lots of words. Nothing on paper.

Will it work? Can Mulroney and Company dance and sing fast enough to make the Canadian electorate forget the past eight hideous years in the country's life? It's not impossible. All he's got to do is (a) stick handle past a couple of political sock puppets called Chretien and McLaughlin...

...and (b) convince us to vote for him.

The first part's easy for a wily old vet like Mulroney. The second part? P.T. Barnum is famous for another saying: "Nobody ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the public."

Let's hope that for once in his life, old Phineas was wrong



Arthur Black

### Make your voice heard

The Terrace Bay Schreiber News welcomes letters to the editor on any subject. Letters must be signed and have the phone number and address of the author for verification. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.