

# EDITORIAL

## Reaping the whirlwind: the politics of fear

Three years ago, eleven men spent all weekend thrashing out a new direction for Canada. Their vision was flawed and exclusionary, and when it appeared that it would be lost, they had to act quickly. Thus, a couple of weeks ago, eleven men spent an entire week thrashing out a new direction for Canada.

Some people never learn.

Even the most insensitive anglophones cannot help but feel a sense of loss at the passage of the deadline for ratification of the Meech Lake Accord. Yet, for most of that three years, the public response was, "What is this deal, and why should I care?"

Very simply, when Pierre Trudeau's Liberal government patriated the Canadian Constitution from Britain, Quebec refused to become a part of it by signing. The Meech Lake Accord spelled out the powers of the federal and provincial governments, including recognition of Quebec as a society distinct from the rest of Canada; this satisfied Robert Bourassa's government, promising to make the country whole again.

Critics of the Accord, particularly Newfoundland's Premier, Clyde Wells, argued that the Accord did not protect minority, native or women's rights, and that the need for unanimous provincial approval would make it impossible for the territories to become provinces.

This is pretty dry stuff, but all involved agreed that it was vital to the future of the country. Why, then, did so few Canadians know what it was about?

Since it was a major part of Conservative social policy, the responsibility for explaining it naturally fell on Brian Mulroney's government; to say they have ignored this responsibility seems a vast understatement. At first, government representatives explained that the Accord would "bring Quebec back into the Canadian family." A noble sentiment, perhaps; a catchy phrase, certainly; unfortunately, what it didn't do is explain how this would be accomplished, or address the critics' objections.

Instead of reason, Mulroney, Joe Clark, John Crosbie and other prominent Conservatives resorted to threats to get Canadians to approve of the Accord. If it was not ratified on time, they said, Quebec would separate and Canada would fall apart.

Well, maybe it will and maybe it won't. Reason and compromise would go a long way to solving the problem. But, the bullying tactic of the Conservatives (accusing opponents of the Accord as anglophone bigots instead of allowing that honest people can hold non-Conservative views) is currently one of the most divisive elements in the country.

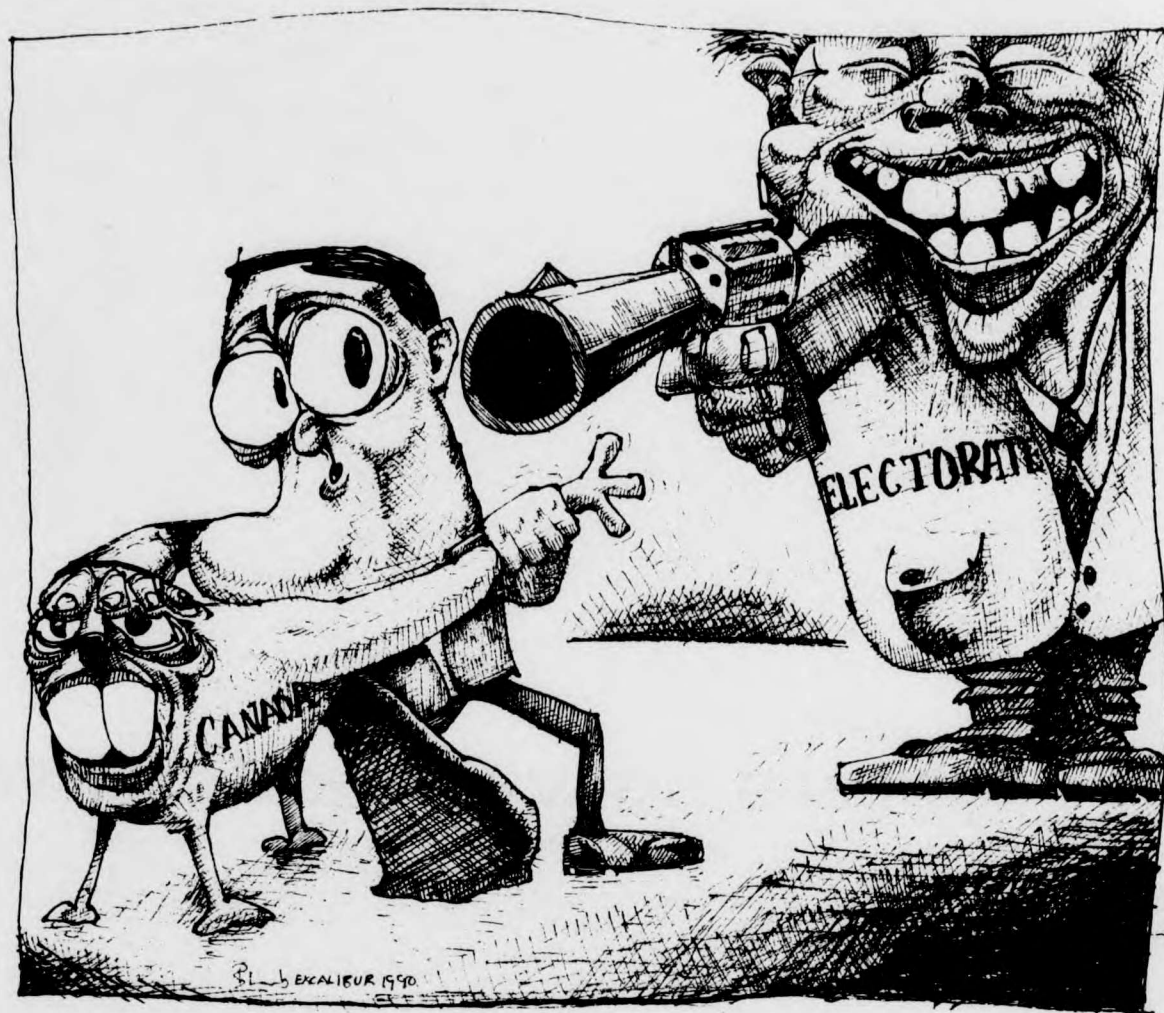
The politics of envy have been replaced by the politics of fear.

This is not the first time this has happened. During the Free Trade debate before and during the 1988 election, the Conservatives argued that if the Agreement was not ratified, American business would flee the country, causing our economy to fall apart. (As it happens, American business is leaving Canada even with the FTA, but that's the subject of another editorial.)

The Conservative government is exhibiting some alarming tendencies: introducing policies they were not elected on; making sweeping changes in Canadian society without sufficient time to work out all the ramifications (the Meech Lake Accord was originally passed in a marathon bargaining session over a weekend — a great way to settle a labour dispute, perhaps, but a terrible way to determine the fate of a country); explaining these changes to Canadians poorly or not at all; and actively promoting fear as a means of gaining support.

Prime Minister Mulroney boasted that he "rolled the dice," that he decided to leave negotiations to the last minute, a tactic to pressure wavering Premiers to come on board. His belief was that their concern over the future of Canada would override their qualms about the Accord. That he could not have foreseen that the Accord would be stopped by an Alberta MLA with no concern for the future of Canada (native Elijah Harper) is beside the point; the Prime Minister set the conditions for this disaster.

The whirlwind that is to come after the failure of Meech is clearly his responsibility.



## LETTERS

Excalibur welcomes letters to the editor on all topics. We will publish, space permitting, letters up to 500 word in length. They must be typed, double spaced, and accompanied by the writer's name, signature and telephone number. The opinions expressed belong to the writers and do not necessarily reflect those of Excalibur staff or directors. However, letters judged to be racist, sexist or libellous by the editor will be refused. All material is subject to editing. All submissions must be addressed to the Editor-in-chief, Room 111, Central Square.

### Students give Quebec perspective on Meech

To the editor,

We are more than 150 students from across Canada studying at L'Ecole de Langue Francaise de Trois-Pistoles, Quebec. We hope that by offering our somewhat unique perspective we may help Canadians to appreciate the importance of the now-defunct Meech Lake Accord.

We have come to Quebec not only to speak the language, but also to try to better understand the culture. In the short time that we have been here, we have been struck with how strongly Quebecers felt about Meech Lake. Recent events in English-speaking Canada have evoked in Quebecers a sense that they are not wanted by the rest of Canada.

Simply stated, the purpose of Meech Lake was to bring Quebec into the Canadian Constitution. The failure of English-speaking Canada to ratify the Accord, even though it had already been unanimously approved three years ago, can only be seen here as a rejection of Quebec.

Recently, there have been many positive political changes in the world. Much of the progress has been due to a more open-minded acceptance of other cultures. As English-speaking Canadians immersed in a Quebecois environment, we students are just beginning to realize how different

the Quebec perspective is. In order for Canada to thrive as a nation, Canadians must recognize and allow for these different perspectives.

Certainly the Accord was not perfect, but it was the product of our democratic process. We believe that Meech Lake provided the mechanisms which allowed these differences to flourish cooperatively. For Canada, it would have been a positive step forward.

Very sincerely,

153 students of L'Ecole de Langue Francaise

### OFA President happy with Swim-a-thon coverage

To the editor,

Thank you for taking the time to speak to me recently regarding the article on the Swim-a-thon June 24 at York University through your interview with Rebecca Polak.

On behalf of the Toronto chapter of OFA, please accept my sincere thanks for a well-written article, which I read while on campus, in your June 20 issue.

Hopefully it helped to generate the much needed public awareness we are striving for.

Yours very truly,  
Ruth Freedman  
President, Ontario Fibrositis Association.

### Executives of CYSF do not deserve their bonus

To the editor,

So, the former CYSF executive members feel they deserved a \$1000 bonus. Perhaps they do deserve the money. But, they haven't outlined any reasons and students have no say in the matter. If Caroline Winship incurred personal debt, she should make public her receipts.

Since the executive did not follow the proper rules in reporting the bonuses at the next council meeting, they obviously took the money illegally. If Jean Ghomeshi wants the money back, he should charge last year's executive with theft. He should call the police.

This is not the first time the executive has given itself bonuses. Unless such behaviour changes, the question associated with the new YFS and students will be, "ask not what YFS can do for you — ask what you can do for YFS."

Sincerely,  
Michael Sullivan  
3rd Year Political Science

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