

What the Media Say

Allan Fotheringham, syndicated columnist:

"The two of them, good Catholics both, have one belief in common: God in his wisdom helps only those who help themselves and both are firm believers in their own destiny."

Newsweek:

"He (Turner) and Mulroney have few substantive differences on economics and they are almost indistinguishable on the subject of foreign policy. Each man argues that he can effectively lobby the United States on the touchy issues of acid rain, and trade and maritime disputes. Each says he plans to continue Trudeau's attempt to make Canada an intermediary between the United States and the Soviet Union, but neither is likely to cause as much irritation in Washington."

New York Times:

"Both parties will try to break out of the geographical confines that have kept them in recent years from being truly national. In the just-dissolved House of Commons, the Liberals had no seats from west of Manitoba, the Conservatives only one of 75 seats from French-speaking Quebec. As an earnest (expression) of their desire for a breakthrough, Mr. Turner will run in the extreme western province of British Columbia, Mr. Mulroney in his native Quebec."

The Byroad to Sussex Drive

The way to high office in Canada does not usually run in a straight line.

For fifty years the parties have most often picked leaders who, though active party members, had also attained considerable success in non-political careers.

William Lyon Mackenzie King was a principal advisor on labour relations to John D. Rockefeller when Prime Minister Laurier picked him as his intended heir.

Lester Pearson was a dazzlingly successful career diplomat, by definition without party affiliation, when he resigned in 1948 and was immediately named Secretary of State for External Affairs by Prime Minister St. Laurent.

John Diefenbaker was a most persuasive attorney with a lucrative private practice. He was elected to the House in 1940, became the Progressive Conservative leader in 1956 and Prime Minister in 1957.

Pierre Trudeau had been a law school professor and journalist when Pearson made him his Parliamentary secretary in 1966 and his Minister of Justice in 1967.

Both the current party leaders, John Turner and Brian Mulroney, have been politically active since youth and Turner served in Trudeau's early Cabinets. In recent years both have been very successful lawyers and business executives.

The Enumerator Calls

Canadian general election campaigns are limited by law to no less than fifty days. The present campaign will last fifty-seven.

The federal office called Elections Canada has shipped tons of material to 282 ridings and 68,000 polling stations and selected and trained 282 returning officers.

When Prime Minister Turner called the election, the Chief Electoral Officer, Jean-Marc Hamel, and his aides set about seeing how many of Canada's eighteen registered political parties would have their names on the ballot. To qualify, a party must run candidates in at least fifty ridings. If it has fewer, the candidate's name is listed but not the party.

Candidates from the parties that placed first and second in each riding in 1980 then picked some 110,000 enumerators, persons who go from house to house compiling voters lists. Every elector on the list is then sent a card confirming that he is on the list and giving information on where and when to vote.

Advance polls – for voters who will be elsewhere on election day – are open for three days in late August and provisions are made so members of the Canadian Forces and other federal government employees stationed abroad can vote. The system seems to work. Over 11 million Canadians, 69.3 per cent of those eligible, voted in 1980.

The Conventions that Prevail

This summer's political campaigns began not with primaries but with leadership conventions.

The Progressive Conservatives' was convened when Joe Clark, the incumbent who had been Prime Minister for nine months in 1979 and '80, asked for a vote of confidence at the regular party convention in Winnipeg in January 1983 and got only 66 per cent approval. He called for a party election and then ran against a field of seven the following June. The rough race wound up with Brian Mulroney first and Clark second. Mulroney became the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons and the man who may be Prime Minister.

At that point, no one knew when the general election would be. General elections are called by the party in power. If a Prime Minister has only narrow control of the House he may decide to call one shortly after taking office if the party's fortunes take an upturn. One whose party has lost favour will postpone the test as long as practical, hoping for improvement.

The Liberals have been in power since 1980 and they had to call an election by 1985. They were low in the polls last winter, but their ratings improved when Prime Minister Trudeau announced his intention to resign and a leadership convention was called for June. They continued to climb when John Turner re-emerged from private life and announced his candidacy. Turner's principal rival was Jean Chrétien, a popular man who had a long and intimate association with the Trudeau government – he had served as Minister of National Revenue; Industry, Trade and Commerce; Finance; Energy; Justice; Indian and Northern Affairs; and Consumer and Corporate Relations.

Turner took a commanding lead on the first ballot and won as expected on the second. When Trudeau stepped down officially on June 30th, Turner became Prime Minister. He immediately named Chrétien as his Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs.

By early July, the Gallup Poll showed the Liberals supported by 35 per cent of the voters, the PCs by 27 per cent, the New Democratic Party by 8 per cent and 28 per cent undecided.

The fundamental uncertainty as to the date of the next election always gives Canadian politics a certain piquancy.

Logic for the Liberals this time seemed to call for an election as soon as possible – in late August or early September – but there were problems. Many Canadians would be on vacation in August, at lake cottages far from their home ridings or out of the country, and Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada as well as of the United Kingdom, was scheduled to pay a visit in July which would be in the midst of the campaign. (Turner as Prime Minister would necessarily spend a good deal of time with the Queen.) An election in late September would coincide with a visit by the Pope, an unprecedented event which might, on occasion, drive the election off the front pages. (Some 43 per cent of Canadians are Catholics.)

Turner went to England to see the Queen in early July and returned to Ottawa Sunday, July 8th, with the message that she would be willing to postpone her tour. Then, on Monday, July 9th, he called the election for September 4th, five days before the Pope's scheduled arrival.