

coming from far behind Claude Wagner and Brian Mulroney. When Prime Minister Trudeau called a general election for May 22, 1979, Clark and the Conservatives slipped in — with a tiny edge over the Liberals and with the backing of the party in third place, the New Democrats. The survival of his government depended on NDP support, and it soon floundered on an austerity budget that seemed to the New Democrats unnecessarily harsh. His government fell when Pierre Trudeau, who a month before had indicated his intention to retire from politics, was swept back into office.

Clark became the active and skilled Leader of the Opposition, but a sizable block of the PC caucus wanted him gone and they, holding him personally accountable for losing the reins of government to the Liberals after such a brief time in control, formed the ABC movement, Anyone But Clark. When the caucus met in Winnipeg last winter it gave him less than the solid backing he had hoped for, and he decided that he owed the party the chance to back him all the way or to tell him to go.

Progressive Conservatives

To American ears the PCs' name seems almost a contradiction in terms. The term 'progressive' has come to mean left, 'conservative', right. In Canada (and in Webster's dictionary) they are nevertheless reconcilable. In fact both the PCs and their rivals, the Liberals, are traditionally centrists; their platforms always differ on specifics but seldom on fundamentals.

The PCs began as simply the Conservatives, most often called Tories, under the leadership of Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, and his Quebec lieutenant, Sir Georges Etienne Cartier, enrolling both French and British, Protestant and Catholic. They remained in power from 1867 to 1896 with a five-year hiatus. They did fairly well up until the Great Depression but have been far less successful since then.

After losing to Mackenzie King in 1935, they added the name Progressive in 1942 and remained alive and reasonably well on the Prairies, but they did not return to national power until the John Diefenbaker years, from 1957 to 1962. They have been out since then except for Joe Clark's nine-month term in 1979.

This year things look brighter. Public opinion polls have shown them consistently ahead of the Liberals.

In the Wings

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau must call a general election sometime before February 1985. Trudeau, Prime Minister for fourteen of the last fifteen years, has indicated that he intends to step down. There is much speculation on who will succeed him as leader of the Liberals, but no candidates have yet announced their intentions.

Editorial Reactions

Toronto Star: Clark can take comfort in the knowledge that he will be remembered for the example of dignity, political courage and decency he set.

Toronto Sun: [Mulroney] deserves KUDOS and the support of the entire party. His platform embraces all those issues central to Canada's precarious economic position. He wants to make Canada a 'desirable' place for foreign investment. He wants to encourage the private sector with less government legislation and more tax incentives. . . .

Vancouver Province: The Conservatives have chosen attractive inexperience over flawed experience by making the suave Brian Mulroney their new leader. . . . His biggest test is yet ahead of him — reuniting his badly divided party.

Calgary Herald: For once the Tories almost did the right thing. At least they decided to make a new beginning . . . Brian Mulroney might well be the man the party has been looking for, with the winning touch of the early Diefenbaker.

Le Devoir, publisher Jean-Louis Roy: La présence d'un chef conservateur québécois transformera la politique fédérale au Québec. Pour des raisons évidentes, le PC consacrera ici, dès la prochaine élection générale, des ressources beaucoup plus considérables que celles, toujours minces et perdues à l'avance, qu'il consentait à son organisation et à ses candidats. M. Mulroney s'est présenté tout au long de la campagne à la direction du PC comme l'homme qui pourrait briser enfin l'hégémonie libérale au Québec et dans les circonscriptions électorales hors du Québec où le vote francophone est un facteur majeur. Dans son parti, on mesurera le succès ou l'échec de son leadership notamment à la réalisation de cette promesse.