

## ERIC MARGOLIS



# Trudeau clone?

Remember those science fiction films where nasty aliens invade the bodies of earthlings, changing them into menacing mutants?

Can something similar have happened in Canada? I am beginning to suspect that our almost Leader for Life, Pierre Trudeau, has contrived to have himself cloned in some secret Swiss laboratory. His undeniably active cells may have been injected into the unsuspecting recipient body of Brian Mulroney.

At first glimpse, I thought Mulroney might finally be "the expected one," come to save our crippled economy from the ravages of socialism. After listening to him these months past, I have the sinking feeling that what we are hearing from him sounds remarkably like the sayings of Chairman Pierre.

Take, for example, Mulroney's recent remarks that if he were elected — and this now appears by no means certain — the PCs would not dismiss a single bureaucrat. Instead, the PCs would "increase productivity" of our uncivil servants by providing them with desk-top computers and fancy-sounding management systems.

Now, any Canadian businessman knows that the octopod civil service and its attendant galaxy of regulations is the prime hinderance to productivity and profit. Its relentless growth and insatiable appetites are rapidly draining our economy of its vital life forces.

One small example will suffice. Recently, Ottawa imposed a host of new, stricter regulations on over-the-counter drugs — products that have been deregulated in the United States. A friend of mine who runs a medium-sized company relates the following woeful tale.

### 'Stop bothering us'

Until the new regulations, he could get what was essentially a food product approved in 30 days. Now, he has had two products under "review" for over a year. After making innumerable calls regarding the status of these products, he was sternly informed by the department head in Ottawa to "stop bothering us... we are too busy. We won't return your calls anymore."

Thus the bureaucracy creates a maze of new regulations, becomes swamped by their complexity, grows testy, and leaves our businessman frustrated, confused and stuck spending expensive time dickering with Ottawa. Meanwhile, the identical products are being freely imported from the U.S.

And how do bureaucrats respond to these problems? Why, naturally, by insisting that they need more personnel, more office space, more training, higher indexed salaries and pensions.

This is simply not so. A few years ago the new U.S. ambassador to Yugoslavia ordered his embassy staff cut by 50%. Work output immediately increased by 100%. The same applies to our bloated bureaucracy. Mulroney must know this.

Canadian industry is fast moving south of the border because of the oppressive deadweight of regulatory controls. Why invest in Canada, with its truculent labor unions, higher wage rates, lower productivity and teeming bureaucrats when the same dollars will buy you a nice, perky business in the deregulating United States.

I can understand that Mulroney, with the polls still in his favor, does not want to anger anyone who can vote. But his *deja vu* politics will probably not do much for either his party or the country. He would do well to study Ronald Reagan's 1980 election campaign.

To be elected, a Republican must gain one-third of the Democratic vote. In spite of Democrats being bribed for years by expensive social welfare schemes, candidate Reagan campaigned on a platform of reducing social spending, regulation and bureaucracy while restoring fiscal responsibility.

## Great political courage

American voters ignored the siren song of the free-spending Democrats — who had brought the U.S. close to bankruptcy — and elected the parsimonious Republicans. Though the Reagan program has proven only partly successful, due to entrenched opposition in the Democratic-run Congress, the growth of state control and ruinous spending have been curtailed.

This program required great political courage; American voters understood it and responded. I do not think that Canadian voters are any less intelligent than their American cousins. They are probably looking for a leader who will tell them what is right, rather than someone who will continue to promise more expensive goodies to everyone.

Unfortunately, Mulroney seems to be continuing the Liberal tradition of portraying government as a giant candy store in which voters can shop on credit for treats. Our real problem has been that voters have been spoiled for years by being given everything that they demanded — without them having to pay the true cost in taxes. This is why we have a \$30-billion deficit.

Buying more filing cabinets for our bureaucracy, providing unlimited health care at a fraction of its real cost, and refusing to cut ruinous federal spending earns votes. But it also means a dollar worth 70¢ U.S. and the inevitable decline of Canada into threadbare Third World socialism.

Mulroney has not addressed this most pressing issue. Instead, his differences with the discredited Liberals appear to be gentle nuances. If the PCs win, I am afraid that all we will see is a new bunch of lawyers dishing up the same old nostrums. In fact, I suspect that should Mulroney be elected, the most dramatic change from the "ancient regime" will be the type of flower he will wear on his hand-stitched lapel.

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