

**A STUDY OF  
THE CYCLICAL NATURE  
OF  
PRIME MINISTER - PRESS GALLERY  
RELATIONS  
1963-88**

**by**

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**A Thesis submitted in conformity with the  
requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts  
in the University of Toronto**

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0-612-45469-X

**Canada**

**A Study of the Cyclical Nature of Prime Minister-  
Press Gallery Relations 1963-88  
Master of Arts 1997  
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This paper explores the relationship between the prime minister and the media in Canada. In particular, it attempts to determine whether modern-day relations between the prime minister and the Canadian news media are characterized by recurring stages or vary, in some fundamental way, with each new prime minister.

The basis for the paper is a U.S. study by Michael Grossman and Martha Kumar, in which the authors concluded that there were three distinct phases during a four-year term: an "alliance" phase; a "competitive" phase; and a period of "detachment". The argument presented in this paper is that Grossman and Kumar's analysis can be applied to Canada, and that the same general cycle of coverage exists in Canadian politics.

The first chapter focuses on Lester Pearson; the second chapter examines Pierre Trudeau's initial term in office, from 1968 to 1972, while the third chapter looks at Brian Mulroney.

## **INTRODUCTION**

To date, there has been only limited academic discussion of the relationship between the prime minister and the media in Canada. Most of the literature that does exist is purely descriptive - exhaustive and detailed descriptions of the Ottawa press gallery and its ongoing relations with each successive administration. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of these works have been undertaken by historians, rather than by political scientists or media scholars. The result has been a body of work that, collectively, more closely resembles an historical anecdote than a thoughtful political or communications analysis.

This paper seeks to venture well beyond the narrow historical focus of past literature. An interesting dimension of prime minister-press relations in Canada is whether this relationship constitutes a *discernible* pattern. Are modern-day relations - 1963 to the present - between the prime minister and the news media cyclical in nature, characterized by recurring stages? Or does the relationship vary, in some fundamental way, with each new prime minister?

As Professor David Taras of the University of Calgary points out in his book, *The Newsmakers* (1991), whether there are, in fact, phases that are truly predictable "...remains an open question, as no serious study has yet been done to chart the peaks and troughs in the prime minister's relationship with the media"<sup>1</sup>. It appears that, six years later, there remains a lack of attention accorded this subject. In a personal letter dated March 26, 1996, Taras writes, "Although, there is a great deal of anecdotal 'wisdom' among Canadian journalists about the building up and tearing down of political leaders, as far as I know nothing substantive has been written or studies carried out"<sup>2</sup>. This paper attempts to fill this void. It tries to provide a systematic analysis of relations between the federal government and the Canadian news media since the election of Lester Pearson in 1963.

The basis for the paper is a comprehensive U.S. study by Michael B. Grossman and Martha J. Kumar in their book, *Portraying the President: The White House and the News Media* (1981). Grossman and Kumar examined the ongoing relations between recent U.S. presidents and White House reporters, from Dwight Eisenhower to Jimmy Carter, wherein they concluded, quite convincingly, that "...throughout the terms of all recent presidents the relationship...has been characterized by strong elements of continuity"<sup>3</sup>, altering in accordance with predictable "phases". According to Grossman and Kumar, there are three distinct phases or periods - what they call "triple exposures" - during a four-year term: the "alliance" phase; the "competitive" phase; and, finally, a period of "detachment".

The first phase which Grossman and Kumar describe is the "alliance" phase. According to Grossman and Kumar, during the first few weeks of an administration, a sort of "silent partnership" exists between the White House and journalists designated to cover the presidency. The partnership is based on two elements: a common definition of "news"; and a willingness by the media to provide an unobstructed channel through which the administration can readily transmit messages to the outside public<sup>4</sup>.

The primary aim of the media, according to the study, is to profile interesting personalities - as Grossman and Kumar put it, to provide the "people" stories that news editors demand. Clearly, the most newsworthy individual in the newly inaugurated administration is the president himself. Thus, the media is interested in several types of stories about the president: stories about him, as a person, as well as his family and friends; stories about his ultimate goals; and stories concerning the president as policy-maker.

Almost invariably, all three varieties of stories are favourable to the president. The reason is simple. Critics simply have nothing to criticize at this point. As Grossman and Kumar astutely point out, when a newly inaugurated president announces general goals, such as lowering unemployment or curbing crime, the media typically do not write critical stories. This is primarily due to one deeply ingrained habit of reporters. When journalists present criticism, they do so on the basis of a comparison between the president's record and his rhetoric. Since the president possesses no record yet, his rhetoric is simply presented as "news".

As a result of this tendency exhibited by the media, a newly inaugurated president usually receives favourable press coverage when he announces general goals, such as curbing inflation or reducing unemployment. A president seems to forgo, in the early months of the term, the type of harsh critical scrutiny that becomes common during the latter part of his term. Grossman and Kumar cite Jimmy Carter, with respect to news coverage of his energy policy, as a prime illustration<sup>5</sup>.

In addition, in this "alliance" phase, it is also in the interest of the president to ensure that the media are provided with ample information, and to cooperate with them as much as possible. Grossman and Kumar conclude that, during this period, both access and information are least restricted than at any other time of the administration. Interviews are more readily granted; press conferences are held on a more regular and frequent basis; important officials are made available for query by reporters; and a greater percentage of information given to the media is "on the record". The pledge of an "open presidency...which is all outside and no

inside,” is common to most incoming administrations (the Eisenhower and Nixon administrations serve as exceptions).

However, Grossman and Kumar emphasize that this is not a “honeymoon” period, as it is commonly labelled, because this implies the temporary suspension of normal self-interest. They argue, rather, that during the phase of alliance, both the president and the White House media hold steadfastly to their original agendas. Although the relationship is more cordial at this time, it is only so because it is advantageous to both parties. During this period, both the president and the media have the potential to gain more through joint cooperation; they share a common desire to obtain maximum exposure for the new administration, its personnel, as well as its policy proposals. Thus, as long as both parties have a common perception of “newsworthy items,” it is only logical for them to cooperate.

The alliance between the president and the media dissolves when journalists begin to take interest in the president’s involvement in conflicts among personalities and controversies over policies. A new stage in the cycle of coverage begins, appropriately entitled the “competitive” phase. Now the media are more interested in the president’s competency in managing the economy, administering the government, and safeguarding foreign policy interests, than during the previous period. Erroneous and scandalous behaviour are suddenly what constitutes “newsworthy items”, resulting in the rapid disintegration of the shared definition of newsworthy items. The implications of this for the president are enormous, as executive control over the agenda is gradually lost.

During this phase, the president views the media as a major competitor in conveying his message to the American public. In his mind, reporters have either focused on the wrong



aspect of the story, or the wrong story entirely. Therefore, the president makes a concerted effort to reassert himself and regain control of the agenda. In order to deal with these critical stories, the president can elect to confront the source of the criticism directly, its messenger, or both. If the sources remain unknown, then the leaks must be traced.

There is a definite retrenchment from the open presidency. Now the White House outlines specific conditions under which officials can interact with the media and seeks to curb unauthorized disclosures of information. As Grossman and Kumar remind us, it was Nixon's obsession with tracking down leaks that led to the formation of the plumbers group, whose illegal activities, in turn, ultimately led to Watergate and the downfall of the president<sup>6</sup>.

The study by Grossman and Kumar also devotes significant attention to attempts made by the president to manipulate relations with the media for the duration of the competitive phase. According to the authors, there are three primary weapons used by the administration. The first weapon is news management, which is the manipulation of the varieties of information provided to reporters by the White House, and of the settings in which information is given to them. The second approach is ingratiation: the attempt to manipulate journalists by performing favors for them, usually involving information. Ingratiation may entail the granting of exclusive interviews; the use of personal friendships with reporters; or, some direct favour, such as an invitation to a private social gathering, or a monetary reward.

The final, and most overt means of manipulating the relationship, is via attack - "...the most explosive weapon in the President's arsenal during the competition phase"<sup>7</sup>. The most important element of attack is the simple use of words, either in press conferences, or in private comments to strategic audiences, in order to target individual reporters and news organizations.

U.S. Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson chose this approach to convey their feelings to journalists, in hopes of possibly intimidating them. The other means of attack is the attempt to undermine the credibility of the media. This includes efforts to discredit reporters with their news organizations, and to discredit news organizations with the public. The form of presidential attack varies considerably, according to the particular style of a president. Yet, some manifestations of attack are evident in nearly every recent administration.

The competition phase is followed by a period of “detachment”, where the conflict between the two competing sides reaches a natural limit. Since each party realizes that the relationship is too important to sever ties outright, they remain cooperative. The intense competition and resulting antagonisms, evident during the competitive phase, are permitted to subside. However, the relationship does not simply revert back to that of the alliance phase. Relations are fundamentally altered. At this stage, the relationship is formalized, substantially more structured than it was in previous periods. Most notably, contacts between the president and the media are more sporadic and take place in highly controlled settings.

According to Grossman and Kumar, the most common media strategy during this phase is avoidance, wherein the administration deliberately skews the schedule to enable the president to appear only in favourable settings. Carter used this avoidance strategy with considerable success. The study also revealed that the precise timing of this detachment phase is usually determined by the president<sup>8</sup>.

The question is: Can Grossman and Kumar’s U.S. theory be applied to the modern Canadian political context? The argument presented in the paper is that Grossman and Kumar’s analysis *can* be applied to Canada, and that the same general cycle of coverage exists in Canadian

politics. However, as will be seen, there are some interesting differences from the American government-press relationship, as presented by Grossman and Kumar, *within* each phase itself.

In order to assist in facilitating an understanding of press-prime minister relations in Canada, the case method has been employed. The first chapter focuses exclusively on Lester Pearson, treating the entire five-year period, from 1963 to 1968, as one continuous term, in view of the intermediate nature of the 1965 election. The second chapter attempts to examine Pierre Trudeau's unique relationship with the media in his initial term in office, from 1968 to 1972, while the third, and final, chapter looks at Brian Mulroney and his turbulent relations with the Ottawa press gallery.

A significant analytical element is to be found intermitently throughout each chapter, with numerous references and comparisons to Grossman and Kumar's study. Most qualitative evidence is derived from print, rather than electronic, sources due to the relative ease of access and the analytical nature of newspaper editorials and columns, as opposed to more "neutral" television reports.

Analysis of newspaper coverage of the prime minister relies primarily upon, although is not limited to, the major dailies: the *Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, and the *Montreal Gazette*. Specific care has been taken to ensure a sampling of commentary from a Quebec newspaper - either the *Gazette* or *Le Devoir* - in order to reveal potential differences in French-English coverage of a particular story, as well as to provide a reasonably accurate picture of the overall national media response.

The paper borrows largely from Allan Levine's recent book, *Scrum Wars*, owing to the fact that it represents the only comprehensive treatment of press-prime minister relations in Canada.

Several of Levine's observations are outlined here. However, this paper goes significantly further in succinctly mapping out the chronological evolution of relations. While *Scrum Wars* reads like a narrative, this paper seeks to provide a more coherent and analytical account of prime minister-press gallery relations. Other main literary sources include, among others, Davis Taras's *The Newsmakers* (from which, the idea for this study was conceived), Peter C. Newman's *The Distemper of Our Times*, George Radwanski's *Trudeau*, and 'So, What Are the Boys Saying?', Michel Gratton's lively account of Brian Mulroney.

It must be stressed that this study does *not* use "content analysis" techniques with its systematic and impartial categorization of information. Media coverage was not coded (i.e. judged "favourable," "neutral," or "unfavourable") as content analysis requires<sup>9</sup>; nor was this the intention. Instead, a carefully chosen sample of media commentary, based upon the aforementioned considerations in the selection of newspapers, is presented on each development deemed "significant".

The obvious problem with this methodology clearly is its lack of empirical evidence. There is no doubt about this. However, the analysis offered within this paper still provides sufficient evidence to competently explore the claim of the applicability of the Grossman and Kumar cycle to Canada. The best Canadian work so far, Levine's *Scrum Wars*, significantly disappoints by failing to see or test any pattern or paradigm to prime minister-media relations. This study proposes to review the history in a manner that reflects and applies, and will test the Grossman and Kumar hypothesis.

Content analysis is not undertaken in this study for two reasons. The first is that such a research procedure would be far too time consuming. It would have been difficult, if not

impossible, to examine and code every relevant newspaper report and column, not to mention every piece of relevant television material. Barry Cooper, a professor of political science at the University of Calgary and distinguished political philosopher who has written extensively on media issues, would concur. Cooper says that the general rules of content analysis require, among other things, that “coding categories be exhaustive,” describing the content analysis procedure he utilizes in his recent study of the *CBC* as “tedious”.

The other consideration with the use of content analysis is its validity - which deals with the question of interesting or significant information - combined with its reliability. Barry Cooper is, once again, very insightful in this respect. According to Cooper, content analysis could only be totally reliable if undertaken by computers; the problem with which would be uninteresting results. At the same time, Cooper states, judgements regarding significant information are not independent of the dispositions of coders or of information available to them. These two considerations, reliability and validity, says Cooper, are often at cross-purposes: “Deciding how much reliability and validity should be sacrificed in order to consider non-trivial questions invariably reflects the researcher’s strategic consideration of the relative importance of the two concepts”<sup>10</sup>.

When one takes these dual concerns into account, it becomes readily apparent why such a research technique is not used in this paper. Although superior to the method adopted here, content analysis clearly has its own set of problems; it is far from perfect. Like the research method employed in this paper, Cooper’s methodology is also limited. As seen above, even Cooper, who uses what he calls “qualitative” content analysis in his study of the *CBC*, makes clear the numerous shortcomings inherent in his methodology.

One will quickly notice that the study is confined solely to the first term of each prime minister. In the case of both Trudeau and Mulroney, this entails the absence of their subsequent terms. This is rather unfortunate. However, due to the sheer volume of potential material involved, the paper had to focus exclusively upon the first term in office. In addition, it should be noted that Grossman and Kumar also looked, primarily, at first terms of office, since only Eisenhower served two full terms during the era they chose to study. Apart from a shorter period of alliance in the second term, they determined that "...it seems likely...that after a four-year term the basic tenor of the relationship between the President and the press will have been set"<sup>11</sup>.

One may be inclined to swiftly arrive at the conclusion, 'So what?'. After all, most people in Canada have been aware of this phenomenon for decades - a "honeymoon" period, followed by a "cooling off" phase where relations steadily deteriorate, resulting in bitter conflict between the two competing sides. Apart from the fact that this conclusion contains a grave omission, namely a period of detachment following competition, it is simply an assumption - nothing more than an "observation", rooted in heresy. Most people have simply *assumed* that this is the actual pattern. They have heard the term "honeymoon" mentioned through various sources and have arrived at the conclusion that it absolutely *must* be true. It is a political phenomenon that has clearly been taken for granted, and, yet, should not be. Besides, the fact that there is an assumption that a pattern of conflict and symbiosis exists, does not detract from the importance of the study. The underlying task of the paper is more than simply to prove the existence of a cycle; it is to probe more deeply into the nature of these power relationships in

an attempt to discover whether the journalistic culture actually functions along predictable lines - and to discern the nature of the rules of the contest.

Most veteran observers appear to agree that there are phases in the media's coverage of prime ministers that are quite discernible. However, there are those who do not agree that the phases in the relationship are perfectly consistent with Grossman and Kumar's description. Most notable is Anthony Westell, an award-winning political reporter in the 1960's, and director of the school of journalism at Carleton University. Westell acknowledges the existence of a cycle. However, he argues that, in Canada, there are "waves" *within* each phase of the cycle, whereby the behaviour of the gallery will tend to fluctuate in accordance with what Westell calls the "herd instinct". Although such a phenomenon would not negate the central premise of Grossman and Kumar's theory, it would reveal interesting variations between Canada and the U.S.

Critics are justified in harbouring such doubts. Trudeau's initial term in office, in particular, clearly does not fit neatly into the cyclical pattern outlined by Grossman and Kumar in their American model. As will later be seen, in the case of the Trudeau administration, the distinctions between the phases are somewhat muddled, as a result of Trudeau's unique adversarial response to the news media almost immediately upon taking office. Thus, it is crucial that one not simply *assume* that there exists a permanent, continuing relationship between the prime minister and the media.

Throughout the paper, there are numerous references to the "gallery," "journalists," and the ever-popular contemporary moniker, "media". It is important to note that this is not to suggest that the parliamentary press gallery, or the "media" as a whole, is, or ever has been, a

monolithic entity. As journalist George Bain says, “The people who are lumped together as ‘the gallery’ are rarely lumped together anywhere - except perhaps at prime ministerial press conferences in times of high excitement, and not all of them even then”<sup>12</sup>.

The primary reason for the inclusion of such broad references is simple. The complexity of this immense, potentially amorphous, topic is significant. By lumping all of these entities together - print and television; French and English - one possesses an opportunity to competently explore this complex topic within the inherent space limitations of a paper.

It is also, in part, a function of space considerations, that the paper begins with the Pearson administration, and not with John Diefenbaker or Louis St. Laurent before him. However, there are several other, more central, explanations for this starting point. One reason is that the Pearson era marked an important watershed in press-prime minister relations. Up until the election of Pearson’s Liberals in 1963, partisanship played a key role in the relationship between the media and the prime minister, particularly up until the 1930s when newspapers served as party organs. Although it can be said that Canadian journalists were not completely independent at the time that Pearson took office, several of the nation’s major newspapers began to shed their party affiliation. It is clear that partisanship had finally lost its appeal. In 1965, June Callwood found that only a minority of gallery correspondents were devoutly partisan<sup>13</sup>. Younger gallery members now tended to emulate the lead of columnists Peter C. Newman and George Bain; they valued journalistic independence and viewed all politicians critically. Thus, by beginning an analysis with Pearson, one is able to make a reliable comparison to the U.S., where media links to political parties have always been weaker than in Canada, especially during the recent period that Grossman and Kumar studied.



The other motivating force for beginning the study with Pearson is that it is consistent with Grossman and Kumar's analysis, in that television became a powerful medium at the time of Pearson's arrival in Ottawa. The U.S. study covered the time period when television began its ascent, on its way to becoming the single most influential medium. This paper strives to do the same, albeit five years later. The time discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that television lagged behind somewhat in Canada, as compared to the U.S.

As will become clear by the conclusion of the first chapter, the paper is undeniably tentative. It is inevitable, since *every* newspaper column and television story during the three periods was not examined, that some significant media commentary was missed. This study does not presume to be the final word on the subject. The aim of the paper is simply to begin to take seriously, and to offer a *preliminary test* of, the Grossman and Kumar theory. This paper will demonstrate that there *is* a common pattern in the prime minister-press gallery relationship.

Few people realize the true significance of the recurring and permanent nature of the relationship. Both sides are locked into a cooperative relationship by their mutual needs. As a direct result, every new administration is severely constrained by its continual need to respond appropriately to the media. Any attempts to radically alter the basis of this relationship, such as in the case of Trudeau, have proven not only undesirable, but, potentially, damaging to the prime minister.

## **CHAPTER 1**

**Lester B. Pearson  
1963-68**

Lester Pearson benefited from a brief period of alliance. During the 1963 election campaign, not only did the traditional Liberal newspapers, such as the *Winnipeg Free Press* and the *Toronto Star* endorse Pearson, but so too did the guardians of Toryism, the *Toronto Telegram* and the *Montreal Gazette*. The *Globe and Mail* also placed its support behind the Liberals. Having lost both patience with, and faith in, John Diefenbaker, the *Toronto Telegram* had switched its editorial allegiance from the Conservatives to the Liberals, prior to the election. The *Toronto Star* typified the gallery's view of Diefenbaker: "Whatever the reason, the Diefenbaker government proved unable to cope with ... the recession that was descending on Canada ... It floundered and hesitated when the economy declined, while unemployment grew". After winning a minority government on April 8, 1963, Pearson was quoted as saying, "I guess I owe the gallery something for all the support I received". He was right.

Pearson had personally known many members of the press gallery and, initially, his relations with the press were positive. Long before he became prime minister in 1963, Pearson had sought out journalists as friends and confidants. His relaxed style and self-effacing wit made him a gallery favourite. "...we all like [Pearson]. You meet Mike Pearson two or three times and you begin to think of him as an old pal," wrote Maclean's Ottawa editor, Blair Fraser, in a complimentary 1951 profile<sup>1</sup>.

The side of his complex personality that Pearson revealed to the media in the first few months of his term was usually the friendly, pleasant demeanour. In contrast to dealing with Diefenbaker, who, in the twilight years of his term, had blamed the press for many of his problems, journalists found dealing with Pearson delightful. "It required constant lip biting to refrain from calling him 'Mike'," recalls reporter Stewart MacLeod. Not all of the press were

elated at Pearson's electoral victory. Some newspapers expressed concern over the advent of a minority government which could result in another fractured Parliament and another period of political uncertainty and instability. However, most of the gallery rejoiced over the arrival of the Liberals.

Reporters were very interested in "personality" stories about Pearson proceeding the April election and throughout the summer. Most stories focused on two particular aspects of the prime minister: Pearson, the man; and his goals and plans.

A large number of stories sought to dissect the new prime minister to uncover the "true Mike Pearson". In the lead-up to a personal profile on Pearson, the *Globe and Mail's* Ralph Hyman revealed his intention: "Lester Bowles Pearson the politician is a known quantity to millions of Canadians who have watched him perform on the hustings ... How many know Lester Bowles Pearson the man?"<sup>2</sup> Throughout the initial few months of Pearson's term in office, attention was paid to such things as Pearson's character, manner, family, and habits<sup>3</sup>.

Particular emphasis was placed upon the conciliatory nature of the prime minister, as evidenced through his role in the resolution of the Suez Crisis, and in settling a dispute between the U.S. and Canadian governments over the seizure of a Canadian rum-running vessel. Pearson's numerous academic honours were also routinely highlighted, as was his lively interest in competitive sport; the endearing intellectual jock. A feature in the *Toronto Star* concluded that "[Pearson's] whole life seems to have been a training ground for the job [of prime minister]". Photo captions in the article received such titles as, "The Family Man," "Pearson At Play," and "The U.N. Era"<sup>4</sup>. The *Globe and Mail* gloated over Pearson, calling him "a reasonable man with a reasonable manner and a reasonable policy" and adding that

“[Pearson] has never allowed international fame and honors to distort his perspective or erode his sense of humor”<sup>5</sup>.

Pearson’s plans for the country would also be heavily featured in the news media during this period. During the campaign, the Liberal government had, effectively, promised to solve the nation’s woes in its first sixty days in office, promising that “more constructive things will be done in the first 60 days ... than in any similar period of Canadian history”<sup>6</sup>. Among the twenty-one specific policy pledges for action in Pearson’s “60 days of decision”: a meeting with British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to repair damaged Anglo-Canadian relations; an immediate invitation to U.S. President John F. Kennedy to meet and discuss Canada-U.S. relations, as well as nuclear weapons policy; and a quick budget, probably by mid-June, which would successfully address the unemployment dilemma.

In making such promises, Pearson had clearly committed his new administration to an unrealistic timetable that begged for critical media commentary. Yet, the media refrained from judging the Liberal policy agenda. Consistent with Grossman and Kumar’s description of a period of alliance, journalists awaited the outcome of Pearson’s efforts before they simply condemned his “Sixty Days” election platform. If ever there was an instance where the press gallery could have, justifiably, criticized an incoming government’s policy proposals, it was with the Pearson administration. However, similar to the historical pattern in the U.S., reporters elected not to.

One of the first things that Pearson did, upon taking office, was take time out of his hectic schedule to address the annual dinner of the Canadian Press in Toronto. In light of the criticism that U.S. President John F. Kennedy had encountered from the American media that

he was attempting to “manage the news”<sup>7</sup>, Pearson issued assurance that Canada would not be witness to anything even resembling this.

Pearson went as far as to even devise his own blueprint for relations with the nation’s media. There was one firm promise: “There must be no censorship, no secrecy beyond the clear and demonstrable requirement of national security. News is not a commodity, but an inherent democratic right and a public trust”<sup>8</sup>. As an adjunct, the prime minister warned that secrets would still be kept from the press, but as few as possible. The promise of an “open” administration, such as this, is the trademark of an alliance phase. Pearson’s declarations closely resemble U.S. President Woodrow Wilson’s early pledge of a government “which is all outside and no inside”. It was an admirable intention. However, the permanent cyclical pattern of prime minister-media relations would later necessitate the very tactics which the prime minister had promised to avoid.

A mere two hours following the speaking engagement in Toronto, Pearson demonstrated that he was genuinely determined to forge a favourable relationship with the gallery. En route to London to confer with British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, Pearson invited twelve members of the press gallery to accompany him. Shortly after he returned to Canada, the prime minister flew to Hyannisport, Massachusetts for a meeting with U.S. President John F. Kennedy. Not wanting to create the impression that he was discriminating among gallery members on his travels, Pearson wisely extended an open invitation to all those reporters who had not previously accompanied him to London. Pearson went even one step further in catering to journalists. To ensure that gallery members were given the “Canadian angle” of his

discussions with Kennedy, the prime minister arranged for press secretary Richard O'Hagan to brief them twice each day and for each reporter to personally meet the president<sup>9</sup>.

Despite all of Pearson's efforts, the alliance would come to an end within a few months of the Liberals' accession to power. Pearson began to face intense media criticism as his government become wracked with scandals. There was, as Pearson reflected during a CBC TV interview on April 1, 1986, "an inevitable hostility between the head of a government and newspapermen".

Problems first surfaced on June 13, 1963, when Finance Minister Walter Gordon presented his first budget. The most controversial component of the budget was the institution of a thirty per cent takeover tax, to be levied on sales of shares in listed Canadian companies to non-resident corporations and individuals. This measure was intended to initiate the long, arduous process of reversing the American acquisition of Canada's corporate assets<sup>10</sup>. With various incentives to ease unemployment and raise revenues, at first, Gordon's economic plan was not heavily criticized by the press. Initial press reaction to the budget, while not overly enthusiastic, nevertheless recognized its objectives. Editorials in the *Globe and Mail*, the *Winnipeg Free Press* and the *Toronto Star* expressed support for the plan, with the *Free Press* proclaiming it "strong medicine for the economy"<sup>11</sup>. However, it would not take long for the tone of the coverage to change.

The very next day, during the Commons Question Period, NDP Member of Parliament Douglas Fisher accused Gordon of going outside of the finance department bureaucracy and recruiting consultants from external firms to assist in the preparation of the budget. This was not entirely unprecedented. But, the fact that Gordon only revealed the participation of these

outside experts *after* Fisher had raised the matter, was viewed, by many in the ranks of the media, as “unacceptable”. The *Montreal Gazette* led the attack, calling on Gordon to confess his error. It was not the only news organization to do so.

The most bitter commentary came on June 19, when Gordon announced in the House of Commons that the dreaded takeover tax would be withdrawn. This action unleashed another barrage of newspaper headlines, this time calling for Gordon’s immediate resignation. An editorial in the *Montreal Star* stated, “It has become obvious that haste and parliamentary inexperience have played far too great a part in the framing, presentation, and defence of the Budget. The Government has got itself into a fine mess”<sup>12</sup>.

Most commentary tended to exaggerate the budget predicament. Both the *Globe and Mail* and the *Winnipeg Free Press* sternly warned that Gordon’s continuance in office would not only jeopardize the future of the government as a whole, but also upset the present delicate balance of power in Parliament. Such comments were representative of the media’s change in attitude towards the Liberal government. Gordon would not resign from cabinet until November, 1965, citing bad advice given to the prime minister in calling an election two months previous<sup>13</sup>.

Throughout the next three years, numerous scandals would plague the Pearson government. It was on the basis of these scandals that, for the most part, the media viciously attacked Pearson - not on his administration’s policies. With each scandal, press coverage would become increasingly negative of the prime minister. There would be times when the gallery backed off from their criticism of the governing Liberals. There was the euphoria of Canada’s centennial celebrations and Expo ‘67 in Montreal. The Ottawa press were also supportive of



selected social policy initiatives, in particular, medicare legislation, the Canada Assistance Plan, the Canada Pension Plan, and the amendment of the Old Age Security Act. However, they would serve as mere brief diversions from the grim events.

The most notorious scandal to rock the Pearson administration was the Munsinger affair: the public revelation of the lurid misadventures of a prostitute, Gerda Munsinger, who had been involved with Tory ministers six years previous. It was an event that would hold the nation enthralled during the spring of 1966. Rumours linking Munsinger with Pierre Sevigny, the former Associate Minister of Defence in the Diefenbaker government, had been circulating the capital for years. Yet, Pearson refused to make the case public.

Ignoring Pearson's plea that he refrain from commenting on Munsinger, newly appointed Justice Minister Lucien Cardin disclosed erroneous details about an RCMP file on "Olga" Munsinger, a dead "Soviet spy" who had been "involved" with Tory ministers. This, in itself, did not prove damaging to the Pearson government. What did was Cardin's explanation for revealing these details. The reason, declared Cardin, was because

There is a working arrangement not only between the Prime Minister, myself and the members of the cabinet, but also all the MPs, and what we're going to do is fight and fight hard, use the same methods that are being used and have been used against us [by the Diefenbaker Conservatives] for the past three years<sup>14</sup>.

It was an appalling statement - one of the lowest moments in Canadian parliamentary history, and the nadir of Pearson's public career, says John English<sup>15</sup>.

Another scandal evolved around Montreal drug dealer Lucien Rivard and Justice Minister Guy Favreau. Favreau was charged with, not just one, but two offences. The charges were, indeed, serious. The first was that Favreau had not consulted his departmental officers prior to

deciding not to prosecute Raymond Denis. Denis was the executive assistant to Immigration Minister Rene Tremblay, who, it was alleged, had attempted to assist narcotics gangster, Lucien Rivard escape extradition to the U.S., by trying to bribe a Montreal lawyer<sup>16</sup>. The second charge levelled at Favreau was that he had failed to inform the prime minister about his decision or the involvement of Guy Rouleau, Pearson's own parliamentary secretary, in the bribery scandal.

The media did not let the government off easily. *Le Devoir* described the Rivard affair as an "explosion of the old Montreal Liberal trashcan"<sup>17</sup>. Although Pearson was pressured by both the press and Opposition MPs to terminate Favreau and Tremblay, he opted not to, instead electing to face the inevitable wrath of the gallery. It would become almost a predilection for Pearson to deal kindly with his ministers upon becoming embroiled in controversy. Both Favreau and Rouleau would later resign.

Matters would continue to unravel, each time involving a Quebec minister. In January, 1965, the RCMP produced evidence purporting to show that Yvon Dupuis, a minister without portfolio, had accepted a ten thousand dollar payoff to obtain a provincial race-track charter for some of his St. Jean, Quebec, constituents. Although subsequently acquitted on an influence peddling charge, the Dupuis corruption case focused significant media criticism on the Liberal government.

A worse blow, however, would come on November 30, 1964, when a Conservative MP charged that Secretary of State, Maurice Lamontagne, and Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Rene Tremblay, had received furniture without payment from a bankrupt Montreal furniture company. Lamontagne had accepted furniture from a store owned by the

Sefkind Brothers: “characters on the fringe of the Quebec underworld”, who had told him that he could pay for it whenever he was able to. When the Sefkinds became involved in a million-dollar bankruptcy, Lamontagne did nothing until creditors pursued him. As Richard Gwyn points out in his excellent full-length review of the incident, Tremblay had also purchased furniture from the company, but had done so legitimately<sup>18</sup>. However, the media immediately seized upon the incident to accuse *both* ministers of wrongdoing.

A large portion of the press demanded that both ministers be dismissed. When Pearson refused to oblige, the press promptly accused the prime minister of waffling in his handling of the affair. Pearson later commented in a *CBC* interview that the press gallery had exceeded their boundaries:

I thought some aspects of [the furniture case] were badly handled by the press. [There were] some ... commentators ... who would take statements that were made in the opposition which we knew to be untrue and, which later, we managed to show were not true, and would use them as a basis of sometimes rather superior moralistic comment on the depths to which these Parliamentarians had descended<sup>19</sup>.

The prime minister would also complain about the “hypocrisy [and] plain unfairness” of those “Press jackals” who suggested wrongdoing on Tremblay’s part.

As Parliament became bogged down with miserable and degrading verbal jousts from both sides of the House, the Ottawa press corps used it as opportunity to dredge up the Pearson administration’s scandalous past. Calling for Pearson’s resignation, the *Toronto Star* claimed he was no longer “equipped” to be prime minister. The newspaper added,

[Pearson] has been able to get some excellent legislation on the books, but time and again his political sense has failed him, plunging his party and the country into crisis after crisis. The Lamontagne furniture affair, the Favreau debacle involving the penetration of criminals into high places and now Mr. Cardin and the

Munsinger smear ... all were badly and indecisively handled. Mr. Pearson has neither the sagacity nor the ruthlessness that are required of a party leader<sup>20</sup>.

The *Windsor Star* also suggested that the prime minister resign in order to allow Parliament to “get back to work”.

Media commentators also attacked Pearson in 1965 when he decided to call an election. Desperate for the majority that had eluded him in 1963, Pearson claimed that he possessed a right - even a “moral obligation”- to ask for a vote of confidence. However, editors and commentators across the country saw it differently, as one newspaper after another complained about the impending decision. The move was perceived by the national media as blatant political opportunism. Such charges were understandable, considering the Pearson Liberals had been in office a mere two and a half years.

The perception of opportunism was reinforced in the late stages of the campaign when Dave McIntosh of the *Canadian Press* wrote a story claiming that Pearson had instructed local Liberals that if a majority was not attained this time, *another* election would be held the following year. Soon after Pearson decided to deny the statement, radio stations across the country broadcast the prime minister’s original remarks, together with his denial that he had never uttered them. Pearson was utterly incensed with the media for, what he believed, was an collective attempt by the media to remove him from power. The incident made the gallery only *more* sceptical of Liberal Party strategy.

When Pearson finally set the election for November 8, many newspapers which had backed the Liberals in 1963, abruptly deserted the party. Of the more than thirty daily papers that had supported Pearson in the previous contest, a total of sixteen shifted allegiance to the

Conservatives<sup>21</sup>. The most notable was the *Globe and Mail*. Just before the election, *Globe* editor Richard Doyle penned an editorial entitled, “The Instruments of Power” - a scathing account, arraigning Pearson for not removing scandalous ministers and for providing no assurances against an impending move to a controlled economy. “The philosophy of the Liberal is very simple,” wrote Doyle, “say anything, think anything, or what is better, do not think at all but put us in power because it is us [sic] who govern the best”<sup>22</sup>.

Other journalists directed criticism at Pearson for holding an election, described as an “exercise in futility”. The impetus for the decision derived from Walter Gordon and Liberal Party National Director Keith Davey, who had both advised the prime minister that the time was propitious to go to the country. It was not. The Pearson Liberals, once again, failed to win a majority, claiming 131 of the 265 seats in the House of Commons - a gain of only two seats over the last election. A surprising number of newspapers of varying political shades called upon Pearson to retire, in light of the results. Due to the electoral disaster, both the *Toronto Star* and the *Montreal Gazette* questioned the value - either to the Liberal Party, or the nation, as a whole - of further leadership by Pearson<sup>23</sup>. Prime minister-press relations had clearly deteriorated.

In response to the media barrage, Pearson engaged in several news management techniques. One example of how the prime minister managed the news was the manipulation of settings. Pearson detested the scrums of waiting reporters that invariably swarmed around him following the adjournment of each cabinet meeting. Newsmen would gather outside the entrance to the Privy Council chamber, in the East Block, where they would proceed to fire queries at the prime minister as he was returning to his office.

From the viewpoint of the press gallery, the arrangement was ideal. It enabled members to question Pearson regarding the cabinet session and Liberal ministers. However, Pearson viewed the ritual much differently. It would not be long before Pearson would begin to complain about these “corridor press conferences”. Pearson felt that the pushing and frenzy of scrums was not in accordance with the dignity of his office. More important, was Pearson’s real fear that he would be prodded into making off-the-cuff remarks which he would, ultimately, regret. Pearson was anxious to bring these scrums to an abrupt end.

The solution recommended by press secretary Richard O’Hagan was the institution of press conferences. The Liberal government proposed to meet journalists in a special conference room in the East Block at the conclusion of every cabinet meeting, or, at the very least, once a week<sup>24</sup>. This would allow Pearson to issue formal statements. O’Hagan added that “Mr. Pearson will also be in a position to properly field all questions tossed at him”. It also afforded government ministers greater protection, as it was now more difficult for reporters to grill them after cabinet. The gallery was not pleased with the new arrangement, but had no choice but to accept it<sup>25</sup>.

A further example of news management by the Pearson government was the planting of leaks. Pearson wrote, in his memoirs, that he did not judge all leaks to be unacceptable: “On rare occasions calculated leaks, no doubt, can be condoned because of the increasing practice of government to label anything ‘confidential’ merely because its disclosure might be inconvenient or embarrassing politically where no question of national security or vital interest is at issue”<sup>26</sup>. Pearson strategically leaked information on a routine basis throughout most of

his term in office. However, the government relied upon leaks the most during the middle stages of its mandate, as a means of dealing with harsh media criticism.

The most famous leak by the Pearson administration was the “flag incident” in May of 1964. Pearson was to deliver a speech in Winnipeg at the annual meeting of the Royal Canadian Legion, where he intended to unveil his selection for the design of a new Canadian flag. A few days prior to Pearson’s Winnipeg departure, Richard O’Hagan invited eight gallery correspondents to an intimate gathering at 24 Sussex Drive. After some friendly conversation and tea, Pearson slyly revealed to his captive audience his choice for the new flag. The “party” then suddenly ended.

Pearson’s intentions for the leak were twofold. First, it would serve as a sort of “trial balloon”, designed both to assess journalists’ reactions to his bold proposal, as well as to prepare his Winnipeg audience and the rest of the sceptical public. Second, it would assist in ingratiating Pearson with the press. As journalist Peter Dempson notes in his discussion of the incident, “Relations between the Gallery and Pearson weren’t as good as they had been”<sup>27</sup>. Unfortunately for Pearson, the ploy did not succeed. Walter Stewart of the *Toronto Star Weekly* regarded the affair as a blatant attempt to manage the news. Thus, Stewart wrote a story on it that evening, attributing it to the prime minister himself.

The “flag incident” had some important ramifications. Pearson was so disturbed by this breach of accepted practice that he denied Stewart any future information. “Walter Stewart [was] treated with the caution one would accord a ticking mailbox,” noted one observer. For a short period, the gallery, as a whole, were denied full cooperation from the Prime Minister’s

Office. Of greatest importance was the fact that the debacle compelled the prime minister to re-evaluate his frequent usage of leaks as a means of battling the nation's media<sup>28</sup>.

A competitive stance was also adopted against the CBC, repeatedly colliding with the public broadcaster during the mid-years of Pearson's term. The first battle centred around a 1964 film profile of the prime minister entitled, "Mr. Pearson" - a candid examination of Pearson and his office during the course of a busy day, when the government was beset with problems.

Scheduled to be televised over the CBC network, this sixty-minute documentary was suddenly suppressed. Several press gallery members, upon learning of this development, penned stories accusing the prime minister of interfering with the CBC - an unforgivable sin. The media continued their assault on Pearson for weeks, even though CBC officials maintained that they had decided to shelve the film solely on the basis of its poor quality. "The film is simply not up to our standards. The lighting is poor, the sound so bad it made me feel uncomfortable, and the camera work so erratic it made me dizzy," commented Ron Fraser, CBC vice-president in charge of corporate affairs<sup>29</sup>.

Peter Dempson claims that the controversy surrounding "Mr. Pearson" marked the conclusion of the alliance phase between Pearson and the media: "It was apparent that the Prime Minister was becoming increasingly sensitive to criticism of himself. It mattered not whether it came from newspapers, radio or television. He was going through the same trouble that beset John Diefenbaker - a souring of the honeymoon with the press"<sup>30</sup>. Pearson, indeed, was gaining a combative spirit with the press gallery. However, as has been seen, the period of alliance had come to an end a full year before this incident.



The CBC television program, "This Hour Has Seven Days" proved to be another nemesis of the Pearson administration. The gallery's new aggressive attitude was epitomized in the style adopted and promoted by the investigative public affairs program. "Seven Days" was not kind to the governing Liberals, arriving early at scheduled press conferences in order to ensure a front row seat from which they could then dominate the questioning and attack the prime minister. One thing was certain: Pearson viewed the program with utter contempt. The prime minister had not only refused an invitation to participate in one of the show's famed "encounter" sessions, but he also took the additional measure of ordering his ministers to do likewise.

In the spring of 1966, the contracts of the show's hosts, Patrick Watson and Laurier LaPierre, were not renewed and the popular program was cancelled<sup>31</sup>. Of course, Pearson was the primary suspect. Did Pearson really attempt to suppress his vocal critics? It is still not known. In his influential book, *The Distemper of Our Times*, Peter C. Newman attributes the act to a decision made by CBC executives, making no reference to Pearson's role in his discussion of the cancellation of the program. "CBC management, assuming the role of the fat and outraged Establishment, ruthlessly and ineptly killed off *Seven Days*," says Newman<sup>32</sup>. Yet, there remains a strong suspicion (and rightly so) that Pearson did, in fact, play an integral role in the ultimate decision to cancel the highly controversial show. The antagonisms between Pearson and the CBC program ran deep.

The Pearson government also employed several methods of ingratiation during this phase of competition. One approach the Pearson Liberals took was to court the elite. Pearson carried

favour with numerous notable journalists who had attained high status in the profession. This was no better exemplified than in the special treatment accorded Peter C. Newman.

Newman's journalistic influence was unmatched. As a syndicated columnist, Newman was the print star of the gallery during the Pearson years; by 1969, his columns appeared in thirty newspapers, reaching two million readers. Newman's column, observed Pearson's assistant Hal Dorman in a confidential 1966 memorandum, "is in many ways more important than any combination of commentaries because it is the basis for a large number of editorials, interpretive pieces and even news stories". Pearson, obviously, shared Dorman's opinion. The prime minister would try to make use of Newman's raw journalistic power by the simple method of keeping him in the office's confidence. A substantial amount of information was leaked to Newman, while Pearson was plagued by scandals. Liberal minister Maurice Sauve and Keith Davey were among the major sources for Newman<sup>33</sup>, whose journalism was remarkable in its accuracy about the internal workings of the Pearson government.

Throughout Pearson's entire term in office, Newman also enjoyed unprecedented access to the prime minister. However, a more concerted effort to appease Newman was made once media criticism surfaced. The objective was simple: facilitate more favourable news coverage. Like others in the gallery, Newman had grown increasingly critical of Pearson. David Taras claims that Newman was one of the two main "thorns in Pearson's side" - the other being the aforementioned CBC television program, "This Hour Has Seven Days"<sup>34</sup>. Pearson was determined to end this "estrangement" between himself and Newman. Thus, when Newman proposed an interview with the prime minister, it was usually granted without the slightest hesitation.

It was also in the middle portion of his term that Pearson performed direct favours. For instance, in 1965, while in the midst of a series of scandals, Pearson strove to appease journalists in order to secure more favourable publicity. The government catered to reporters' every whim, even providing them with scotch, on occasion.

A very important ingratiating tool utilized by Pearson was the cultivation of personal friendships with several reporters. Similar to U.S. President John F. Kennedy, Pearson's temperament and interests were compatible with those of many journalists. Thus, like Kennedy, the prime minister had little difficulty forging friendships among members of the press gallery. However, unlike Kennedy who used selected friends among journalists to channel information, Pearson employed his friends in the gallery to provide a protective shield against incoming media assaults. As the attacks mounted, Pearson retreated to the security of a small group of trusted friends in the media: Blair Fraser, Bruce Hutchison, and George Ferguson, among others.

The mild-mannered Pearson would also make use of verbal attack in his ongoing battle with the media - much to the surprise of the gallery. On one occasion, Pearson lectured gallery members and suggested that newsmen should return to being reporters. Pearson argued that there was too much analysis and too little factual reporting, urging journalists to be less sensational and more responsible. "Newspaper editors are always bleating about the refusal of politicians to produce mature and responsible discussion of the issues," Pearson wrote in his memoirs. "The fact is, when we do discuss policies seriously, we are not reported at all or reported very inadequately. Reporters do not appear even to listen, until we say something controversial or personal, charged with what they regard as news value"<sup>35</sup>. This statement

lends considerable validity to the contention of a cyclical relationship in Canada. After all, one will notice that this is, precisely, the same complaint of Prime Minister Jean Chretien today.

The relationship between the prime minister and the press gallery began to take on a vastly different tone in 1966. Relations which had become tense and strained during the wave of scandals to hit the Liberal government, changed once more, now showing signs of being distant and detached. Pearson used both of the strategies outlined by Grossman and Kumar in their description of the detachment phase.

A visible attempt was made to avoid the media. In fact, for a period, Pearson steered clear of journalists altogether, prompting reporters to accuse the administration of being too secretive. The governing Liberals had clearly progressed from merely managing media access to a strategy of avoidance. The meetings with reporters in a special conference room was attempted but, ultimately, failed. Pearson's press conferences had become fewer and farther apart - a sure sign of detachment. It had become increasingly difficult to persuade Pearson to attend the briefings, with his aides routinely informing assembled reporters that the prime minister had no news. Therefore, gallery members had once again congregated within the confines of the East Block corridor. As his administration became bogged down in one controversy after another, Pearson would avoid these hallway confrontations, and justifiably so. After two long and trying years, the gallery was informed that the historic custom of questioning the prime minister in the corridor outside the cabinet chamber was to be abolished. Journalists were to be banned from working in the Government Lobby in the House of Commons for the remainder of Pearson's term<sup>36</sup>.

Several newspapers viewed the move as an outright assault on the freedom of the press - a principle which Pearson had so triumphantly heralded when first elected. An editorial which appeared in the *Toronto Telegram* on February 18, 1966, offers valuable insight into the motivation behind the decision: "While the latest move by the Liberal caucus to restrict the Gallery's lobby privileges has come as somewhat of a surprise, it should not be. For the Liberals, in recent years, have been showing signs of unhappiness with the press, and have been chipping away at its rights"<sup>37</sup>. This is an astute observation. It was this "unhappiness with the press" which, gradually, and inevitably, led to the demise of press conferences, and ultimately, the banning of reporters from working in the Government Lobby.

The Pearson government also made a concerted effort to bypass the media, another definite indication of detached relations. In the first months of the administration, journalists expressed a willingness to provide an unobstructed conduit on which the government could convey messages to the public. But, this changed. Pearson felt that his hard-won successes in constructing economic and social programs had not been adequately recognized by the Ottawa press - a view which he would cling to for the rest of his term in office. As Clive Cocking observed, Pearson "left office thinking that the press had done him in"<sup>38</sup>. It does appear that the team of O'Hagan and Davey had failed in public relations. Despite a tremendous increase in the number of government information and press officers, the Liberals' message did not find its way through to the media or the public. Pearson came to the realization that he had to discover a means by which to somehow disseminate information without the filter of the press gallery. He chose live television.

On February 19, 1968, a major money bill - part of Finance Minister Mitchell Sharp's budget resolutions - was narrowly defeated in the House of Commons by a vote of 82 to 84. However, it was not without controversy. The defeat was an accident, partly owing to a low Monday turnout and the fact that three Liberal leadership contenders (including, John Turner) and some of their supporters were absent, campaigning delegates. As well, Pearson himself was on vacation in Jamaica at the time of the vote<sup>39</sup>.

Following the defeat of the crucial vote, the prime minister appeared on national television to explain why he did not consider the matter a vote of non-confidence in his government. Pearson pleaded that the mishap had been "a hazard of minority government", and, thus, failed to constitute a true defeat<sup>40</sup>. It would prove to be a successful communications strategy. Later that month, the Liberals were sustained. Although it had left behind a bitter legacy, the crisis had been resolved. Pearson's appeal marked the first time that a prime minister had used the medium of television to make a direct appeal to the Canadian public. Constitutional conferences would, subsequently, be televised. The intention was clear. The public would, it was hoped, formulate their own judgements about Pearson's leadership, rather than relying upon contorted press reports. In Pearson's mind live television was certainly a preferable alternative to the press gallery, with their alleged tendency to distort information originating from the government.

Prime minister-media relations during the Pearson administration, unequivocally, passed through the oscillating cycle described by Grossman and Kumar. Initially, Pearson's relations with the press gallery were quite favourable. In the eyes of journalists, the new Liberal prime minister was a welcome sight, in light of the recent deterioration of relations with the outgoing

Diefenbaker government. Criticism could have come easy in the wake of the minority government's overly ambitious "Sixty Days" policy platform. However, the media instead focused attention on the personal attributes of Pearson himself: his character; his background; his demeanour.

Signalling the end of the alliance phase was the shift of media focus, a mere two months into the term, from Pearson's personality to his government's ensuing problems. As the administration became embroiled in a series of scandals, journalists in Ottawa turned hostile, depicting Pearson as a poor leader with weak conviction. By doing so, Pearson was compelled to resort to news management, ingratiation, and attack, in order to receive more favourable media coverage. A lengthy period of competition had begun.

By 1966, relations would become cool and detached. The Pearson government moved to both bypass traditional media channels, and avoid contact with journalists altogether. Pearson would be the first prime minister to use live television to appeal directly to the populace; he did this on two separate occasions.

By the time of Pearson's resignation in 1968, it had become evident that he had failed to avoid a similar fate to Diefenbaker. Pearson had been unable to alter the government's relationship with the media. He had endured the same treatment accorded U.S. presidents by White House reporters. There is no discernible difference.

## **CHAPTER 2**

**Pierre Elliott Trudeau  
1968-72**



Pierre Trudeau's relationship with the media is a strange and unique case in Canada. Trudeau displayed outright contempt for the press throughout nearly all of his term in office, seemingly defying the normal gravitational stages outlined by Grossman and Kumar. Odd also was the media response to the Trudeau administration, which remained favourable until 1970: nearly three full years into the government's mandate.

During the initial stages of Trudeau's inaugural term, the relationship followed the predictable pattern of an alliance phase. For a very brief period after the election, reporters were provided with the best access that they would have at any time during Trudeau's tenure in office. Government information was widely available and officials readily accessible. However, as will be seen, this was the most "open" that the administration would be. This is a crucial point. A central feature of a period of alliance is an administration which is not necessarily deemed to constitute an "open" one, but which is *more* open during this time than at any *other* time during the term. The vast majority of scholars, erroneously, overlook this point, accordingly, declaring the non-existence of a "honeymoon" period.

The early reportorial response was also characteristic of an alliance phase. Nearly every newspaper in the country expressed contentment with Trudeau's election victory; a significant number were even enthralled, such as the *Toronto Star* and *Maclean's* magazine. Typical of this phase, hardly a single editorial failed to emphasize its elation over the fact that Lester Pearson was finally gone. An enthusiastic *Victoria Times'* editorial typified the general response of the nation's media: "[The] Liberal victory ... marked in a most tangible way the emergence of this country from the old to the new ... We have broken out of the flatlands of the past and now move ahead to the promise of the unexplored but rising ground ahead".

After his victory at the Liberal leadership convention in April, 1968, there was an unrealistically high level of expectation among the reporters covering him. In their columns and television reports, the media generated the campaign phenomenon known as “Trudeaumania” - a Beatles-like public adulation. Journalist Walter Stewart explains:

We whined after him, strewing his path with adjectives, pouring bile on his enemies and scorn on his competitors ... We were sure this was no fly-by-night affair; we were enduringly entranced<sup>1</sup>.

George Radwanski jokes that Trudeau’s election forced the media to invent a new vocabulary for political reports and commentaries. It was felt that Trudeau would produce a Kennedy-type rebirth in Ottawa.

It was the style of the prime minister that appealed to journalists: “... his way with clothes, his way with sports, his way with cars and women and deep books and deeper philosophy, his biting wit, his arrogance, his selfishness, his wisdom about big things and ignorance of small ones”<sup>2</sup>. These combined traits were new in a national leader and the gallery revelled in it - even elite journalists. It was felt that Trudeau would produce a Kennedy-type rebirth in Ottawa. As Radwanski explains, “Newman turned into a pom-pom waving cheerleader, and Pierre Burton let out yips of joy in his commentaries”<sup>3</sup>.

By the end of the campaign, the candidate had become more transparent and flawed to a portion of the press gallery. Some editorial writers and columnists harboured concerns about the Trudeau government’s intransigent position on Quebec’s special status and its sketchy and inadequately defined policies. Yet, most newspapers were willing to give Trudeau an opportunity to prove himself - not unlike what the gallery had done for the incoming Pearson administration. “Mr. Trudeau should have no hindrance placed in his way ... The government

must have every chance to succeed,” proclaimed the *Montreal Gazette*. It should also be noted that both television and print offered substantive policy reviews of the new Liberal government, but commentary regarding the various policy goals and proposals was quite rare. There can be no doubt; Trudeau was certainly given ample opportunity, by the media, to perform.

The mere fact that the press supported Trudeau at this point in the term is not unique - it simply marked the traditional stance of journalists towards each and every new prime minister.

Walter Stewart concurs:

From the first we followed [Trudeau] around like so many moon-struck lovers, just as we had, in turn, fallen for Diefenbaker and Pearson. Where do people get the notion that reporters are cynical? We're hopeless romantics, always looking for a saviour, often certain we have found him<sup>4</sup>.

The abnormal aspect of the press's adoring adulation was its duration. As late as 1970, television and print journalists continued to treat the Liberal government kindly, supporting one of its most potentially divisive pieces of legislation: the Official Languages Act. As *La Presse* noted, even editorial comments in English-language newspapers were non-hostile.

There were times during this period in which the media assumed its traditional role as government critic. The best example can be found in the reaction to the Trudeau administration's first major foreign policy initiative. On April 3, 1969, the prime minister announced that Canada would be instituting reductions in the troop strength of its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) contingent, to be phased in beginning the next year. Canada would remain a member of NATO, but with a reduction in its commitment to the defence organization.

Within just two days of the announcement, the media responded with resounding criticism. Editorials across the country were critical of the decision, including the *Vancouver Sun* and the

*Ottawa Journal*. The *Calgary Herald's* commentary was indicative of the gallery's response: "Mr. Trudeau displays little understanding of military logic in holding that this nation's defence posture can be strengthened at the same time its forward line in Europe is weakened ... Canada has a prime minister who nurses an intellectual disdain for and abhorrence of all things military". Several other newspapers alluded to how Trudeau was blinded by emotion in arriving at the decision. Yet, such negativity from the press did not endure.

The primary reason that the prime minister was the recipient of such a long sympathetic hearing in the press was that the charismatic Trudeau "made good copy", especially for the dominant news medium, television. With his personality, style, and showmanship, Trudeau was the ideal figure for television. Due to Trudeau's special compatibility with television, producers and reporters involved with the medium *needed* him on camera, answering their queries. Although access would be restricted early into the term, there was the realization among news organizations that, if they became hostile to the government, access to their star performer would be restricted even further.

Thus, TV reporters demonstrated a rather stubborn reluctance to be inimical to the prime minister. It is this which, largely, explains the "personality cult" that the media were said to have constructed around the prime minister. It is doubtful that this was the *sole* force behind the extended period of favourable coverage accorded the prime minister. After all, it is important to realize that not only is the prime minister dependent upon the media, but the reverse is also true: the media is dependent upon the prime minister.

Many journalists themselves were surprised that Trudeau escaped gallery criticism for so long; they assumed that it would arrive far earlier. For example, Norman DePoe of *Maclean's*

penned an article in 1968 entitled, "Why the Knife-Wielders in the Ottawa Press Gallery Will Soon Start Carving Up Trudeau". In it, DePoe predicted that "Trudeau may find much of his trouble coming from ... the news media, whose long love affair with him, while still mostly idyllic, is showing signs of strain"<sup>5</sup>. DePoe cited several statements in the press which, he believed, signalled an oncoming period of media criticism - including an editorial in the *Toronto Star Weekly* telling Trudeau bluntly that the telling moment was now: can he translate his ideas into action? If not, the editorial implied, the prime minister better prepare for plenty of criticism from the gallery. On the basis of past prime ministers', as well as U.S. presidents' experiences, DePoe had good reason to forecast such an outcome. However, Trudeau's "long love affair" with the media, as DePoe put it in 1968, would become *very* long by 1970.

Trudeau adopted an adversarial stance towards the press gallery remarkably early into the term - earlier than nearly every U.S. president. Almost immediately upon Trudeau's arrival in Ottawa, while the gallery was still fawning over him, the prime minister had already begun to employ tactics highly characteristic of a competitive phase. It represented a unique response - one which had certainly never been witnessed in Canadian politics.

One thing the prime minister did was try to clamp down on leaks. Although Trudeau himself had passed on secret information to journalists while serving at the justice department, leaks, despite how small or insignificant, now upset him. Trudeau had not approved of the way gallery reporters had so easily infiltrated the Pearson cabinet, wherein the leaking of confidential government information had "turned into a flood and Trudeau was determined to turn off the tap"<sup>6</sup>. The prime minister threatened to call upon the services of the RCMP in the event of any leak of information.

There were several instances where Trudeau reacted angrily to leaks in his government. First, in June, 1970, Trudeau ordered the RCMP to investigate when the report of the Le Dain Royal Commission on the Non-Medical Use of Drugs was leaked to reporters<sup>7</sup>. Trudeau had kept his word about calling the RCMP.

Another report would be leaked in December, 1969, when *La Presse* published excerpts from the report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. Trudeau threatened to take legal action against the Quebec newspaper, claiming copyright violation<sup>8</sup>. It had been part of the government's policy to withhold the release of commission reports and task forces, unless deemed absolutely necessary. This policy of concealment outraged journalists, who felt that they possessed a collective right to know the immediate contents of reports, rather than receiving a truncated version at a later release date.

Another leak involved Bill Wilson, Ottawa bureau chief of the *Montreal Star*. In the midst of the FLQ Crisis, Wilson wrote that a "source" had informed him that the Liberal cabinet had discussed the possibility of "censoring" the Montreal media. Of paramount concern were several privately-owned radio stations in Montreal that had supposedly broadcasted inaccurate and inflammatory news reports about the crisis. However, Wilson's information was not completely accurate. A cabinet committee had considered "controlling" the city's media - not censoring it<sup>9</sup>. An angry Trudeau vehemently denied the story, promptly summoning ministers known to be confidants of Wilson, in a feverish attempt to trace the source of the leak. As is the case with most leaks, the attempt to track down its source proved futile. After this episode, no minister or bureaucrat would have the courage to be seen with Wilson in public; he was, thereafter, relegated to the telephone to deal with sources.

The Trudeau administration also managed the news via the careful scrutinization of staff contacts with the Ottawa press corps. The accessibility that had marked the early Pearson years was abruptly closed off and Ottawa was converted to a closed city. Rather than have journalists control the lines of communication, Trudeau desperately desired control for himself. Gallery members were stunned when Trudeau forbade members of the Liberal caucus and civil service, to converse with anyone associated with the media.

Reporters now lamented for the chummier pre-election days, when phone calls to ministers were returned and bureaucratic contacts were willing to talk openly. In the past, there had always been a number of alleyways to the same information - cabinet ministers, MPs, aides to important ministers, senior bureaucrats. However, many of these sources dried up with Trudeau's recent decision. "Reporters who had been on a first-name basis with cabinet ministers before the twenty-fifth of June [the election] would phone for appointments with these old friends and be turned away coolly by secretaries," noted Christina McCall-Newman<sup>10</sup>. The result, according to Walter Stewart, was that the gallery knew less about the internal affairs of government than ever before.

It appears that government staff were justified in their fear of leaking to reporters. Allegedly, Trudeau told one of the nation's premier political observers that if he began printing cabinet secrets, the RCMP would be called in to investigate, not the reporter, but the cabinet ministers who leaked the information. As will be seen, this was not a mere idle threat; Trudeau was very serious about requesting the assistance of the RCMP.

At the same time, under the Trudeau administration, the decision-making process began to drain into fewer and fewer hands. In particular, there was a marked accumulation of power in

what was called the “Supergroup”: a set of key political figures within the administration, which included Marc Lalonde, Ivan Head, Jim Davey, Gordon Robertson, and Michael Pitfield (i.e. cabinet less, PMO more). The dominance of the Supergroup was clear:

The reporter who doesn't have at least one contact among the Supergroup is in trouble; he cannot know what is really happening within Ottawa's circles of power ... if the reporter sets forth views or findings that don't coincide with the truth as revealed by the Supergroup, he may not have his contact long<sup>11</sup>.

As a result of this concentration of power, there were fewer people to talk out of turn, and stronger reasons for those reporters confided in, not to make the information public.

A further way in which the Liberals managed news was the strategic manipulation of settings. As the term progressed, access became quite restricted. A prime illustration of this was Trudeau's excursion to the Soviet Union in May, 1971. Trudeau had always tried to curb press activities, but his means of achieving news control on this particular journey were ingenious. Christina McCall, one of the journalists on the trip, wrote in *Macleans* magazine, “[Trudeau], or more particularly his aides in collaboration with the Russian press office, managed to turn the 40-person press corps into two busloads of creaking tourists who caught glimpses of the official party only on occasion”<sup>12</sup>. McCall goes on to describe how the Canadian media contingent were housed in separate quarters from the official party, transported in different airplanes as the group traversed the country, and excluded from official discussions and social functions. The whimsical nature of McCall's piece inherently lends itself to potential exaggeration. Nonetheless, it illustrates the extent to which Trudeau was willing to control media access.

Trudeau would attack the media with a vengeance in October, 1969. In a Montreal speech, the prime minister threatened to dismantle *Radio Canada* if it failed to shed its alleged



separatist bias. The following year, the *CBC* was also the subject of stern threats. The network was casually “informed”, by the prime minister, that it was “overplaying” the Cross kidnapping during the early days of the FLQ Crisis. Action would be taken, Trudeau warned, if the problem was not addressed. Both threats successfully served their purpose. *Radio Canada* underwent a convulsive house-cleaning after Trudeau’s speech, and the English *CBC* reacted in such panic to his rumblings during the Cross kidnapping that it cancelled a documentary on Russian Premier Vladimir Lenin, apparently, on the grounds that it would fan revolutionary fervour<sup>13</sup>.

On another occasion, Trudeau, it has been alleged, tried to transform the *CBC* by installing his colleague and long-time friend, Pierre Juneau, as president of the corporation. However, the plan failed. As veteran *Southam News* columnist Charles Lynch points out, Trudeau never tired of attempting to do something about the *CBC*<sup>14</sup>.

Engaging in various ingratiation techniques, as Pearson had so frequently done, did not interest Trudeau. Trudeau had no desire to seek favour by catering to the wishes and vanities of journalists. U.S. President Richard Nixon shared a similar viewpoint. In a now famous quote by Trudeau, he said,

I don’t have much time for the press, in the sense that I don’t curry their favour or try to be palsy-walsy with them or butter them up. I know that some politicians think it’s part of their job to be nice with the press ... I just don’t have time to do it ... I’ve been told hundreds of times I should have four or five press people at the end of the afternoon having a drink around this office. Quite frankly, at the end of the afternoon when I finish my work, I’d rather go home and see my kids<sup>15</sup>.

This statement by Trudeau in 1977 provides a good summary of his feelings about the subject throughout nearly all of his time in office.

Unlike Pearson, Trudeau made no attempt to court the elite. Lumping all journalists into one monolithic group of “raving jackals”, the prime minister made “little distinction between the lightweights and those like George Bain of the *Globe and Mail*, or Bruce Philips of *CTV* who know what they are talking about”. (Although, it should be noted, Val Sears of the *Toronto Star* claims to have been granted special access to the prime minister).

It is important to note that, although Trudeau’s early adversarial approach was unorthodox, it did *not* violate the recurring pattern of relations, as outlined in the Grossman and Kumar model. Grossman and Kumar are careful to stress this possibility in their description of the alliance phase. “Some administrations don’t move very far in the direction of opening up the White House and providing access,” explain the authors, citing both the Eisenhower and Nixon administrations as examples<sup>16</sup>. One must remember that, although not very open, the Trudeau administration was the most open that it would be, in the weeks proceeding the election. In this respect, and in many others, the Trudeau administration almost mirrored, in particular, the course of the Eisenhower administration, which was characterized by less variation in its relations with news organizations than by any of its successors.

The press gallery felt betrayed by Trudeau. Gallery members expected the prime minister to treat them with the utmost respect, in light of the fact that it strongly believed that it had been a crucial element in his rapid ascent to power. It is questionable whether the gallery was justified in its expectations. One thing is certain: they were completely unrealistic in their expectations of Trudeau.

The role of the press gallery in Trudeau’s election, however, should be acknowledged. The media were definitely a major contributing factor, not only in launching the Trudeau

candidacy, but also, in propelling it towards success. A study conducted by the political science department of Laval University discovered that between the period of January 1 and March 20, 1968, with nine candidates in the Liberal leadership race, sixteen major newspapers across the nation had given Trudeau twenty-six per cent of their total campaign coverage<sup>17</sup>. Admittedly, the sheer volume of press coverage was not solely responsible for Trudeau's subsequent leadership victory. However, the enthusiastic attention of the media was a vital asset.

Yet, Trudeau, feeling that he owed the media nothing, proceeded to treat them coldly. Trudeau had bruised the collective ego of the gallery. This would serve to foster a tense, often hostile, relationship between the prime minister and the media. As Charles Lynch commented, "It was inevitable that our admiration would eventually change to the adversarial attitude"<sup>18</sup>.

This analysis reveals one important widely-held misconception: that Trudeau did not care what the media said or wrote about him. Nearly every discussion of Trudeau's early relations with the press makes a specific point of mentioning this anomaly. Keith Davey insists that the prime minister did not worry much about his relationship with journalists<sup>19</sup>. In his chapter on Trudeau, Allan Levine comments,

Though [Mulroney] scanned the front pages of the major dailies on the way to work each morning and read the stacks of clippings prepared for him by his office at his desk in the Commons, he was truly indifferent to what newspapers or TV, which he rarely watched, had to say about him...<sup>20</sup>

If Trudeau really was indifferent to media coverage of his government, then why did he go to such great lengths to attack the press and manage the news that disseminated from media channels? Had Trudeau not been concerned about what the media said about him, as most observers claim, he would not have been concerned about what the manner in which the *CBC*

covered the October Crisis, for instance. The prime minister certainly would not have threatened the network, knowing that a strong likelihood existed that his remarks would eventually become public. Just because Trudeau did not devote a lot of time to the reading and watching of news does *not*, necessarily, signify an apathy, on the prime minister's part, towards the musings of the gallery.

Relations between the PMO and the press gallery did, eventually, fall into the predictable cyclical pattern. The period had arrived late, but it did arrive. By Trudeau's third year in office, an important change had developed in the press's coverage of the prime minister. In 1970, the media became highly critical of the Liberal government, ushering in a *mutual* phase of competition.

With the exception of the government's management of the Canadian economy, no single issue created as much adverse press reaction for Trudeau as the October Crisis of 1970 when the Front of the Liberation of Quebec (FLQ) kidnapped British Trade Commissioner James Cross and Quebec's Minister of Labour and Immigration, Pierre Laporte. The media's attention to this subject marked a crucial shift away from a preoccupation with the prime minister's personality to an increased emphasis on broader national issues, characteristic of a competitive phase.

Initially, press coverage of the crisis was favourable. In the immediate aftermath of the murder of Laporte on October 10, 1970, editorial writers praised the prime minister. On October 19, the *Montreal Gazette* declared, "Canadians can be thankful for the resolute leadership the Prime Minister is providing at this sad and difficult hour. His dedication to individual liberties should be fully obvious". The same day, a *Winnipeg Free Press* editorial

triumphantly declared that the War Measures Act spelled the death of the FLQ, as well as the separatist movement in Quebec. The *Globe and Mail* also editorially supported the invocation of the Act.

However, “Trudeaumania” had not returned. When the government enacted the controversial War Measures Act on October 16, only a few media outlets voiced serious objections to the action immediately. Then, two weeks after the first kidnapping - that of Cross on October 5 - the majority of the media condemned Trudeau’s decision to declare martial law in the province.

Detailed editorial assessments of Trudeau’s handling of the crisis soon began to surface and would continue long after December of that year, when Laporte’s kidnappers were apprehended and the Cross abductors negotiated a Cuban exile. Most were heavily critical of the Trudeau government, particularly its decision to use the War Measures Act. An editorial in *Le Devoir*, on October 26, referred to the invoking of the Act as the arming of Quebec’s Justice Minister and police forces with the “instruments of repression”. Such commentary was representative of the sort of negative media response encountered by Trudeau.

The advent of 1971 witnessed the early return of a problem inherited by the Trudeau administration: unemployment. An editorial in the *Edmonton Journal* sharply criticized the Liberal government’s employment policies:

The effect of Mr. Trudeau’s economic policies is that 538,000 people were out of work in December [of 1970] ... The worst thing about it ... is the fact that the government shows no awareness that there has been anything wrong with its economic record or that better, more effective, and less brutal policies are needed in the future<sup>21</sup>.

In wake of this high unemployment rate - the worst showing in nine years - Trudeau proclaimed that the government's "many many" measures to combat unemployment were just beginning to take effect. However, the media seemed to be bewildered at what these "many many" measures were, incessantly complaining about the Liberals' inaction on the unemployment issue.

A further issue that the press began to develop in the same year was foreign ownership of the Canadian economy. The media were relentless in their attack on the government's foreign ownership policies, which many journalists perceived to be the final abandonment of Canadianization objectives. Statistics indicated that there was a one-year increase of 13.3% in the assets of foreign-owned corporations.

The Liberal administration defended the rapid influx of foreign capital as a necessity for the reduction of regional economic disparities. But, many columnists refuted the validity of the government's argument. A June, 1971, article in *Maclean's* magazine insinuated, quite legitimately, that, in heralding equitable regional development, the Liberal Party was merely trying to gain political advantage in Quebec and Western Canada<sup>22</sup>. An editorial in the *Winnipeg Free Press* accused the Liberals of precisely the same thing.

The primary source of media discontent appears to have been an acute sense of disappointment: "In ... employment policies, regional development policy ... the reformist promises put forth by the Trudeau government before 1968 have resulted in bitter disappointment;" said Claude Lemelin of *Le Devoir* "one can even say there has been a definite regression with respect to the directions undertaken under the Pearson regime". The media's illusions had clearly been shattered. As Charles Lynch observed, "In the final analysis

journalists found [Trudeau] a disappointment, his promises of a new age, a new Camelot in Canada, unfulfilled”<sup>23</sup>.

The press gallery did not constantly attack the federal Liberals during this period. For instance, Trudeau’s marriage to Margaret Sinclair in early March, 1971, brought with it a brief truce with the press. According to Christina McCall-Newman, Mrs. Trudeau’s presence inspired some of the most favourable prose ever printed about a Canadian public figure<sup>24</sup>. One editorial called her “a charming and permanent hostess at the prime minister’s residence whose atmosphere ... will be enhanced by the presence of a gracious chatelaine”. *Le Devoir* wrote this laughable description of the marriage: “In the secret recess of his heart Pierre Trudeau had installed a fine flower of the Rockies. Having sunk her roots there Margaret will bloom. Some will say the wife is very young but what better to bridge the generation gap”<sup>25</sup>.

Furthermore, the announcement by the government of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Ottawa and Peking, was greeted with favourable media response. A *Globe and Mail* editorial on Sino-Canadian relations commended Trudeau for initiating a process which enabled “an enhanced cultural, trade and political relationship with China”<sup>26</sup>. However, such positive coverage was transient and, thus, does not serve to negate the theory of cyclical prime minister-media relations. What it does do is lend credence to Anthony Westell’s claim of the existence of waves within each phase of the cycle.

It is clear that prime minister-media relations travelled through a final period of detachment. Not only did contacts between Trudeau and journalists become *far less* frequent - they became almost non-existent.

This was no more apparent than during the 1972 election campaign. Although journalists covering Trudeau at this time still felt that they possessed a “traditional right of reasonable access,” the Liberal election team efficiently transported reporters from one locale to another, keeping them away from the prime minister. In an entertaining piece entitled, “An Efficient Operation,” George Bain wrote,

Mr. Trudeau rides at the front of the plane; his staff occupies a separate cabin behind; the more numerous press are aft. To see the Prime Minister it is necessary only for any reporter to nip quickly out the exit under the tail of the aircraft and run around to the front to watch him descending the ramp<sup>27</sup>.

When Trudeau did meet with reporters, it was on *his* terms, preferring small, intimate discussions. This was a practice, lamented Bain, “about which many journalists have uneasy feelings because it introduces a grace-and-favour element into what ought to be a working relationship”<sup>28</sup>. Unable to gain access to Trudeau, several members of the gallery, including Charles Lynch, Hugh Winsor, resorted to criticizing the Liberals’ “carefully orchestrated campaign”.

Lack of access to the prime minister was nothing new by this point, as has been shown. However, it is important to note the difference in accessibility from the initial four years of his term and the final year. By 1972, media access to Trudeau and his staff had become *extremely* restricted. Rather than attempt to merely limit contact with journalists, Liberal communications strategists orchestrated a strategy, leading up to, and including, the 1972 election, of outright sequestering. The change in the relationship between the prime minister and media was certainly discernible, even though there are those, such as Allan Levine, who overlook the transformation.



There was also an effort by the Trudeau government, towards the end of the term, to find a way around the filtered lens of the press gallery. In April, 1970, the government created a new agency - Information Canada - in order to communicate its policies to the public, undiluted by the likes and dislikes of the media (or, as Walter Stewart says, “just in case the press doesn’t process its quotient of news carefully enough”). The new “Ministry of Truth,” as Stewart calls it, came to fruition as a result of a perception among Liberal party members that the federal government and the public were not coming into meaningful contact. Trudeau, in a speech announcing the creation of Information Canada, capsulated the goal of Information Canada:

We intend to do as much as we can to correct the lack of proper information available to the people of Canada so that they will know that they live in a federal state and that the federal government is very much present in their lives<sup>29</sup>.

Information Canada was to consist of three main parts: an output section, charged with devising ways to get the government’s story out across the country; an input section to gather information on how much of its message is actually getting through to the public, and alter the channel of communication if it is not working; and a policy section, concerned with coordinating the total federal information package<sup>30</sup>, including the consolidation of departmental press releases and the coordination of press conferences throughout the government. The new federal agency was to have an annual budget of \$7,000,000 and would report directly to Robert Stanbury, a Minister Without Portfolio, who was to assume some responsibilities of the overextended Department of State. Charles Lynch says that no one should have been surprised that the relationship between the media and the prime minister, which began so warmly, should have ended so coldly. It has always gone this way, says Lynch<sup>31</sup>. He is right.

In March, 1954, John Kenneth Galbraith wrote a remarkable article in the *New York Times* entitled, "The Build-up and the Public Man". Galbraith's description of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's experience with White House reporters comes stunningly close to describing prime minister-press relations during Trudeau's time in office, up to the detachment phase:

The autonomous build-up always strikes someone who is already in the public eye. Perhaps he has earned a measure of public esteem for doing an important and difficult job in a restricted area of public endeavor. Or he has made a promising start on such a job.

... Then comes the build-up. He is a man transformed - indeed he is no longer a man but a superhuman. His eccentricities become the mark of unique personality ... But most remarkable of all are his qualifications for the job he has assumed. Where others ponder, he has solutions.

The build-up is particularly likely to occur at a time when problems are numerous, vexations and incomprehensible ... The press and the networks, sensitive always to the needs of the customer, assist ... They create the master statesman who will see us through.

Such statesmanship, as a career, is not especially secure ... Since the build-up is indiscriminate in its selections, some rather grievous shortcomings may thus be revealed ... There is a convention which allows those who have taken part in the build-up to participate in its ensuing deflation. The build-up rarely lets its man off at his point of departure<sup>32</sup>.

Galbraith was writing about the build-up as it affected Eisenhower. However, there are remarkable parallels to be drawn between this vivid description and the nature of the media's coverage of the Trudeau administration. One might even mistake it for a description of the media-induced "Trudeaumania" and its aftermath.

Trudeau's first term represents a unique period in prime minister-media relations. The mere fact that the media initially fawned over the flamboyant prime minister is not rare. What *is* rare is the duration of this non-mutual adulation, coupled with Trudeau's uncharacteristically premature adversarial response. "Trudeaumania" locked the press into a perpetual state of

entrancement, producing an enthusiastic fervour among reporters never before seen in Canada. The media-generated phenomenon was the result of the prime minister's suitability for television and the media's need for such an appealing individual. It was also, in part, due to a noticeable absence of scandal.

During this period of remarkable hype and hysteria, Trudeau did not return the affection. Instead, the prime minister treated the press as an adversary, attacking them with verbal threats, zealously hunting down leaks, and reducing access to civil servants and his staff. This may appear to destroy the application of Grossman and Kumar's model to modern Canadian politics, but it does not. It only runs counter to the *regular* progression of phases. Indeed, during the first weeks of the term, journalists were accorded the greatest degree of access they would enjoy under the Trudeau government. Also, the gallery did, eventually, begin to criticize the government - with an energetic spirit rivalling that of their previous admiration. Comparisons, in both of these respects, can be made to U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

There was even sufficient time for a brief period of detachment, whereby passions ignited during the previous year were allowed to simmer. Similar to Pearson, Trudeau engaged in both of the tactics mentioned by Grossman and Kumar. Access was severely restricted: the most "closed" that the Trudeau administration would become during the term. In addition, Information Canada was created to provide a direct, undiluted path to the public.

## **CHAPTER 3**

**Brian Mulroney  
1984-88**

Brian Mulroney also enjoyed an alliance phase in his relationship with the media, albeit without the raw passion and exuberance that accompanied Trudeau's "Camelot". Upon arriving in the capital, Mulroney had an ideal opportunity to receive favourable press coverage. Excluding the brief regimes of John Turner and Joe Clark, Mulroney followed Pierre Trudeau, "a man whose disdain for the media equalled his disdain for the general public. And in both cases, the feelings were mutual"<sup>1</sup>. Since the Trudeau administration had developed abrasive relations with many news organizations, members of the press gallery were eager to have the chance to cultivate contacts with a new, fresh group of officials.

During the short period preceding the enormous electoral victory by the Conservatives, the media appeared, first and foremost, concerned with reporting on the character of the newly elected prime minister: his family, friends, personality traits, as well as his past.

According to Allan Levine, Mulroney's heritage was particularly seductive to journalists. Born in Baie-Comeau, Quebec, into an Irish working-class family, Mulroney's roots "were a natural hinge for journalists" in early profiles, notes Levine<sup>2</sup>. A brief review of print coverage of the new prime minister supports Levine's claim.

Early stories about Mulroney often constituted no more than biographical features. Several columns documented, extensively, Mulroney's herital upbringing as a young member of a diligent, earnest Irish clan in a small rural town in francophone Quebec<sup>3</sup>. A substantial number of columnists depicted Mulroney as a genuine outsider - the first prime minister who had never been part of the national governing system and who, indeed, had devoted most of his life to fighting it. As the son of a hard-working electrician and a graduate of St. Francis Xavier

University in Nova Scotia, journalists emphasized the new prime minister's apparent lack of contacts and connections.

Particular attention was paid to this "outsider" status, combined with Mulroney's "Irishness" in an attempt to forecast how he would try to implement the mandate for "change" that the prime minister had been given so resoundingly. *Toronto Star* columnist Richard Gwyn wrote,

In many ways, Mulroney behaves exactly as stage Irishmen are supposed to behave ... The eagerness to entertain. The teary sentimentality ... the governing establishment is experienced and adroit ... The determining factor in how different Mulroney's government will be, and how long, is Mulroney himself. At a guess, he'll remain different for quite a while. It may be true that he's come a long way from Baie-Comeau. But you can never take all the Baie-Comeau out of a boy, and even less so all of the Irish. Above all, you can't take it out of an Irishman who's a natural, irrepressible optimist<sup>4</sup>.

Characteristic of a period of alliance, personality profiles of the prime minister were, almost invariably, friendly in tone and content.

Any discussion of proposed policies, even controversial ones, such as the free trade agreement with the U.S, were, at this point, treated with respect. Consistent with Grossman and Kumar's observations, a strong feeling seemed to exist among reporters that the new prime minister should be accorded an opportunity to perform. Thus, criticism at this time would be unfair. Indicative of this approach was a lengthy piece by Hugh Winsor of the *Globe and Mail*, on September 5, 1984, entitled, "Mulroney Will Move Fast to Produce a New Look." In the article, Winsor provided an in-depth description of all of the new government's stated policy objectives. What was conspicuously absent from the aforementioned discussion was any kind of analysis or critique of these policies<sup>5</sup>.

There were those in the press gallery who criticized Mulroney's oversimplified platform, and questioned his personal integrity. However, dissent was minimal. With the inevitable collapse of journalists' old nemesis, Trudeau, most commentary contained a sense of unqualified optimism: a sense of hope not witnessed since the days of "Trudeaumania" sixteen years earlier. "The massive vote that Brian Mulroney and the Conservatives harvested ... should plant new vitality in a political process stultified by the near monopoly the Liberal party has held for the past two decades on the federal scene," exclaimed the *Regina Leader-Post*. Numerous other newspapers, including *Le Devoir*, expressed similar sentiments in the wake of the Tory win.

In the initial few weeks after the election, the press also lavished attention upon the prime minister's wife, Mila. Focusing on Mrs. Mulroney's "refined but trendsetting" style, and her tireless devotion to her husband and family, many articles were written exclusively about Mila<sup>6</sup>. And each one fawned over her. In fact, in a partial review of newspapers following the election, there was no piece which could be even remotely be considered "negative".

Most journalists respected the Conservative landslide victory, hailing it as the beginning of a new era in Canadian politics. The post-election reportorial response was especially favourable in the province of Quebec, where the Tories captured 58 out of 75 seats. The media response was not altogether surprising, since, during the campaign, "a number of editorials and columns in Quebec came out in favour of Mulroney's Conservatives"<sup>7</sup>.

In his influential study of the 1984 election, Professor Frederick Fletcher of York University concluded that, "It was Mulroney who struck the responsive chord among Quebec journalists"<sup>8</sup>. Francophone journalists were pleased with the appointment of numerous Quebec

politicians to Mulroney's cabinet. In particular, they were ecstatic that actress Andree Champagne, one of the stars of a popular Quebec television series, "Les Belles histoires des pays d'en haut," had been elevated to the cabinet.

The new cabinet was, for the most part, well received by the entire press gallery. Later, the cabinet would be described by the media as everything from "accident-prone" to a "collection of clowns". As Mulroney's press secretary, Michel Gratton, says, "In the beginning, [the media] were friendly, even fangless, wolves"<sup>9</sup>. One is left to wonder how Allan Levine arrived at the quick, evidence-free conclusion that "Mulroney was never accorded the traditional honeymoon treatment, when journalists go easy on their prey". Richard Doyle, editorial-page editor of the *Globe and Mail*, arrived at the same conclusion<sup>10</sup>.

Yet, Mulroney was not aware of an important source of this renewed sense of media optimism. Lacking a true understanding of the dynamics of the prime minister-media relationship, Mulroney severely underestimated the degree to which this support was merely a function of the working press's reaction against Trudeau.

The reason for such a miscalculation is simple. Blinded by a personal fascination - arguably, near-obsession - with the media, the prime minister only saw what he wanted to see: a loving and sympathetic press gallery; essentially, a cooperative ally. From the very outset of his term, the media had held a disproportionate importance in his eyes. Mulroney's fascination with the press, and need for constant affirmation from them, is well documented. In 1991, John Sawatsky wrote, "Regardless of where Mulroney was, he needed constant fixes of the latest news ... At times he would sleep with a radio playing under his pillow. He would devour



five newspapers a day, and half his time out of town was spent looking for them"<sup>11</sup>. Michel Gratton remarked that the media was "served up a media junkie on a silver platter".

It was this hunger for affirmation from the media which caused Mulroney to cooperate so greatly during the early months of his tenure in office. By making his staff readily accessible to gallery reporters, Mulroney hoped to receive favourable treatment from television and print journalists, alike. The prime minister held on tightly to the rather naive expectation that, by catering to the media in this manner, he could rely upon them to give the government "fair treatment". Clearly, Mulroney did not understand the underlying nature of the government-press relationship. A few months into his term, he would.

Relations with the media deteriorated within Mulroney's first year in office. Within months of Mulroney taking office, the press had already begun to critically evaluate the government. Yet, the harshest reporting on the Mulroney government would arrive with a series of scandals that were to hit the Mulroney administration. Over the next three years, the Mulroney government would be wracked by scandals and resignations among cabinet ministers, the likes of which had never been seen in Canada - not even with the Pearson government. As a result, the shared definition of newsworthy items that had originally led to stories supportive of the prime minister during the alliance phase, rapidly dissipated. The "boys" of the press gallery, with whom Mulroney had initially held in high regard, began, in the fall of 1985, to report abundantly on the Tory government's missteps.

The middle of September, 1985, marked what would be two weeks of hostile relations with the gallery. Difficulties began for the Mulroney administration on the 17th of the month when the now-infamous "tuna scandal" broke. According to the CBC public affairs program, the *Fifth*

*l:state*, nearly one million cans of Star-Kist brand tuna, which federal inspectors had found decomposed and unfit for human consumption, were distributed to Canadian supermarkets. The TV program claimed that federal Fisheries Minister John Fraser had overruled his own department in order to have the products released for public sale. Fraser contested the claim that the tainted tuna posed a health hazard, insisting that the matter involved merely “some changes in regulations”.

The Ottawa press was not kind to the the Conservatives in their appraisal of the situation. The *Globe and Mail* blasted Fraser for exercising ministerial discretion in a matter of public health: an area in which discretion is not tolerable<sup>12</sup>. Several columns appeared to critically mock the party. “In a way, [Fraser’s] action is the ultimate act of Tory faith ... put the tins on the shelves and let the marketplace decide the tuna’s fate,” commented Jamie Lamb of the *Vancouver Sun*<sup>13</sup>. However, the most biting criticism was in the *Toronto Star*.

A *Star* editorial entitled, “Time to Can the Minister,” demanded Fraser’s dismissal: “Something is rotten when a government responsible for health and safety standards lets rancid tuna onto Canadian supermarket shelves ... it’s time for [Fraser] to be canned”<sup>14</sup>. Fraser would soon succumb to the pressure from the media and Opposition MPs, announcing his resignation a week later. Two days after Fraser’s exit, Marcel Masse also resigned as Communications Minister over allegations of exceeding authorized campaign spending during the 1984 election. Other Tory MPs were also under investigation for the same thing.

Before the tuna scandal had dissipated, the gallery was provided with another controversy, this time involving Minister of State for Transport, Suzanne Blais-Grenier. The flamboyant Quebec minister was charged with abusing her authority and wasting taxpayers’ money in two

separate trips to Europe while she was federal Environment Minister. News organizations jumped on the story, chronicling her journeys in stark detail. Media criticism focused on whether the minister's trips were arranged largely to provide Blais-Grenier an opportunity to visit various destinations, including Paris and Leningrad, among others. The *Toronto Star* was blunt: "... there is reason to believe [some] functions were contrived to give Blais-Grenier an excuse to visit Paris, Stockholm and Leningrad". Blais-Grenier flatly denied these allegations. She admitted that portions of the two trips were personal holidays, but that she had paid for them herself.

Interestingly, the Quebec press paid relatively little attention to the Blais-Grenier story. While the print and electronic media outside of Quebec became consumed with the allegations of wrongdoing, the Quebec media elected to focus their efforts on other items. For example, the *Montreal Gazette* barely mentioned the scandal. This reluctance by the francophone press to consider such matters as "news" deviates from the U.S. cycle outlined by Grossman and Kumar.

Both Mulroney and Deputy Prime Minister Erik Nielsen accused the journalist who broke the story of Blais-Grenier' trips - Christopher Young of *Southam News* - of "some kind of racism," owing to the simple fact that Blais-Grenier was French-speaking. Such allegations are absurd. Neither the English-language press's criticism, nor the French-language press's reluctance to report the story, represent any manifestation of racism. They are merely the reflection of a French-English dynamic unique to Canadian politics.

For some reason, the Quebec media's definition of "news" does not mirror that of the anglophone press, as they largely elect to ignore stories of personal impropriety. It has been

suggested that the francophone media simply have a propensity to respect the privacy of politicians, whereas the English-language media, almost invariably, view the personal affairs of political figures as public domain. This is why, some assert, Brian Mulroney always felt more comfortable in the company of francophone reporters.

Yet, one suspects that there is a further dynamic in the Quebec media's perception of such matters as "trivial". It is conceivable that the francophone press simply *assume* such corruption, tracing back to Quebec Premier Maurice Duplessis and even further, and thus deem incidents like the Blais-Grenier affair to be of marginal importance or value: "unnewsworthy". What *is* certain is that the two distinct approaches of the Ottawa press gallery is reflective of the dualistic nature of Canadian society. Speaking of the francophone and anglophone portions of the gallery, Allan Fotheringham observes, "The press is as bifurcated as the country of which [Mulroney] is the prime minister"<sup>15</sup>.

It would not be long before another scandal erupted. The Mulroney government was the recipient of even harsher media commentary in late April, 1986, with the Sinclair Stevens affair. Allegations were made in the *Globe and Mail* that Industry Minister Sinclair Stevens had committed a serious breach of the government's conflict-of-interest guidelines. The previous year, the wife of Sinclair Stevens negotiated a year's free interest, amounting to more than \$300,000, on a loan. Anton Czapka, the individual who issued the loan, had long and close connections with Magna International, a firm to which Mr. Stevens' department had contributed substantial grants. It was Magna's chairman who referred Mrs. Stevens to Czapka. The loan was made to the real estate arm of a holding company controlled by Mr. Stevens, but

whose shares had been in blind trust. Mr. Stevens maintained that his wife had never informed him about the loan.

Not only did most journalists disbelieve Mr. Stevens' ignorance of the situation, but they were also very critical of the way Mulroney handled the incident. Away on a trip in the Far East when the news first broke, the prime minister was reluctant to discuss the scandal with reporters travelling with him. Mulroney eventually agreed to hold a brief press conference, but refused to answer any further questions. "The affair deserves more explanation than the blustering responses the prime minister has given," declared an editorial in the *Calgary Herald*<sup>16</sup>. Considering that Mulroney had, simultaneously, to face media scrutiny surrounding charges of corruption, bribery and breach of trust against Conservative MP Michel Gravel, his angry response was predictable.

In the new year, scandals continued to plague the Tory administration. On January 17, 1987, the *Montreal Gazette* ran a front-page story claiming that Andre Bissonnette, the new Minister of State for Transport, was involved in a complicated land flip. At issue was whether there was a leak of cabinet information informing speculators that a major defence plant was planned to be constructed in Bissonnette's riding of Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. The land parcel was purchased, and then promptly resold a total of three times within just twelve days, tripling in value from \$800,000 to nearly two million dollars. Three months later, the final purchaser, Swiss defence firm, Oerlikon Aerospace Inc. was awarded a six hundred million dollar defence contract to supply Canada's Low-Level Air Defence (LLAD) system with missile launchers. This would also raise questions as to Oerlikon's role in the land flip.

It was reported that the “flipping” of the land resulted in substantial monetary gains for several of Bissonnette’s constituents, including the president of his riding association, who was alleged to have received nearly one million dollars from the flip. A forlorn-looking Mulroney announced, the following day, that Bissonnette had been requested to resign from the cabinet, and that “a complete investigation” into the affair by the RCMP had been already ordered.

By and large, the media commended Mulroney for acting swiftly and decisively and forcing Bissonnette to resign immediately. However, coverage of the incident was quite harsh. Respected *Globe and Mail* columnist, Jeffrey Simpson, dubbed it the “Chickengate affair,” owing to the fact that Bissonnette had become a millionaire in the chicken industry<sup>17</sup>. In addition, the decision by the prime minister to refer the matter to the RCMP was not viewed positively by the press.

“Preferable” alternatives to a police investigation were abundant in newspapers. In its assessment of the Oerlikon affair, the *Toronto Star* proposed that the incident be examined by a parliamentary committee. An editorial in the *Montreal Gazette* suggested a wide-encompassing public inquiry into the affair. Both papers expressed concerns about the inherently confidential and secretive nature of a police probe, as well as about the fact that such an investigation would probably fail to encompass the other crucial issue: the awarding of the contract itself<sup>18</sup>.

In April of that same year, *Globe and Mail* reporters Stevie Cameron and Graham Fraser unearthed Conservative Party cancelled cheques, indicating that the PC Canada Fund had been used to pay for extensive renovations at the prime minister’s residences at 24 Sussex Drive and Harrington Lake<sup>19</sup>. Cameron and Fraser noted that the arrangement constituted a private pact

between Mulroney and David Angus, the chairman of the fund. Use of the fund in this way was, in itself, legal. However, Cameron and Fraser went on to say that, in November, 1984, Mulroney had told reporters that he would personally pay for any further renovations at 24 Sussex Drive. Mulroney had been caught lying.

The next month, the *Globe and Mail* ran a series of stories on the extensive renovations, containing vivid descriptions of the Mulroneys' clothes and "huge closets". Once again, the English-language media lunged at these stories, portraying the Mulroneys as a "vain couple, consumed by wealth and status". As with the Blais-Grenier incident, Quebec journalists devoted very little attention to these stories. "No one in Quebec has ever written much about shoes and nice clothes," says *La Presse* columnist Lysiane Gagnon. "It was considered normal. What was wrong with Mila Mulroney shopping at Holt Renfrew?" she asks. The Quebec media found nothing wrong with it.

Mulroney and PMO officials were utterly incensed with Cameron. As Gratton related, "Stevie ... felt harassed and taken aback by the personal attacks launched against her after that, and was genuinely surprised at the wrath she had unleashed in Mulroney"<sup>20</sup>. "For [the Mulroneys] it was like being naked in public," a close confidant of the Mulroney family told Michel Gratton. Bill Fox, the PMO communications director, took particular exception to the renovation story. Fox allegedly threatened to "rip" *Toronto Star* reporter Joe O'Donnell's "fucking lungs out" for a piece that he wrote on the story.

The media continued to attack Mulroney, as each "superfluous" expenditure was meticulously documented by journalists. They reported extensively on the long cortages of vehicles for every official entourage. They mentioned the "luxurious hostels" where the prime

minister stayed. They criticized the “overblown” security. News organizations did not care about the fact that the Mulroney administration possessed very little control over these items; such arrangements were made at the discretion of the host nation. “They make us look like a bunch of free-spending snobs,” complained one associate of Mulroney.

Although the media devoted most of their attention to Tory scandals, they did grant extensive news coverage to a major policy initiative: the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA). This was not the case, initially. The day after Mulroney announced his free trade initiative with the U.S. in 1985, virtually every question from the gallery dealt with the recent resignations of ministers, rather than with the new policy<sup>21</sup>. However, this would change later that year.

Surprisingly, pre-election media coverage was, on the balance, favourable to the proposed FTA. Although it appears that the national media portrayed the FTA in a negative light during the course of the 1988 election, this was not the case prior to the campaign<sup>22</sup>. Participants at a May 27, 1989, conference on media coverage of the free trade agreement concluded that only three major newspapers - the *Edmonton Journal*, the *Toronto Star*, and the *Montreal Gazette* - did not write editorials in support of the agreement<sup>23</sup>. *The Financial Post* called free trade, along with reducing the federal deficit, *the* answer to Canada’s economic problems, while the *Calgary Herald* echoed the editorial stance of many newspapers in proclaiming the FTA a mutually beneficial pact between two “friends”. During the 1988 election campaign, even *Montreal Gazette* publisher, Clark Davey, wrote a front page article in which he personally endorsed the Conservative government and its free trade policy.



Considering that the prime minister's personal integrity, not to mention his government's competence, was being placed under searing examination during this same period, this is a surprise. Free trade was, after all, a policy which had been recommended by a major Royal Commission headed by a former Liberal minister of finance. Yet, it does not represent a violation of Grossman and Kumar's hypothesis. On the whole, the press was very critical of the Mulroney administration during the middle portion of the term.

Prior to the scandals, Mulroney had already retaliated against the media. Immediately upon learning of the gallery's newly acquired hostility towards the administration a few months into the term, the Tories took the offensive. The first measure undertaken by the Mulroney administration was the severing of media access to the bureaucracy. The Conservatives wasted no time in instituting the prohibitive move. In late November, 1984 - less than three months into his term - Mulroney unveiled a mandatory "gag rule" for all bureaucrats. Guidelines were issued indicating that all contacts with the media by public servants should be made on an open, on-the-record basis. Off-the-record background briefings would be permitted only in exceptional circumstances and had to have prior ministerial approval<sup>24</sup>. Mulroney, who had attacked the Liberals during the 1984 election campaign for their "secrecy, stealth, and stonewalling," suddenly appeared hypocritical, falling into the familiar cyclical pattern..

The administration was not so naive as to believe that this move would deprive the gallery of the usual "reliable sources". It was simply meant to combat leaks - at least, to compel civil servants to think carefully before embarrassing the government. The new adversarial role adopted by the press gallery had instilled a sense of unease and tentativeness in the new Tory administration. Now, under the careful scrutiny of the media, Mulroney was concerned about

public servants relaying potentially damaging information to the press, or criticizing government policies while hiding behind their anonymity. Any criticism of government policies, the Tories were convinced, would have been leapt on by Ottawa journalists eager to get what was now considered, by the media, to be “news”.

The impetus for the move was leaked memoranda within the External Affairs Department.

As Michel Gratton concedes,

We were convinced that our greatest enemy lurked within the bureaucracy, in the form of Liberal sympathizers, wedged into the woodwork during two decades of Liberal administration; there had been incidents in which bureaucrats, speaking off the record, raked the government, to perk our paranoia<sup>25</sup>.

The new policy mandated that all conversations between members of the media and public servants be for attribution, with the bureaucrats named. Gallery members lambasted Mulroney for trying such a misguided manoeuvre. Editorials were unanimous in their perception of the new communications policy as a “cover-up”. Fortunately for the media, the arrangement proved untenable, resulting in the scrapping of the plan although, theoretically, off-the-record discussions between journalists and bureaucrats were still forbidden. Columnist Don McGillivray argued that these rules demonstrated an ignorance of how press gallery journalists operate.

Mulroney also managed the news with the decision, in the fall of 1985, to eliminate “scrum”: “those impromptu crap-shoot press conferences where the Prime Minister usually wound up looking like a cornered animal”<sup>26</sup>. The noisy sessions were replaced by bi-monthly formal news conferences. The Conservatives were insistent that the change had been requested

by the press gallery. However, it was not. The gallery executive had never suggested an end to scrums.

The real motive for the change was to get back to “controlling the agenda” in the prime minister’s comments to the press. There had been too many occasions when, in these spontaneous scrums, Mulroney had either overstated or understated events. At formal news conferences, Mulroney could exercise control over proceedings and ponder each query in a deliberate fashion. With scrums there was no control:

The Prime Minister would do a scrum at the door and then he would walk up to the first floor landing and three people who had missed the scrums at the door would want him to do another one. Then he would go to the second floor and there would be ten people there. One day he had to do four scrums from his office to the car<sup>27</sup>.

Of the manipulation of settings, Stewart McLeod, in the *Winnipeg Free Press* said, “It ... marks a sharp break from his initial, informal, no-holds-barred relationship with the media”<sup>28</sup>. It is an astute observation.

Such a change was inevitable - Lester Pearson had done, basically, the same thing. There appears to be a sequence. A new prime minister may be expected to tolerate scrums - in fact, welcome them, on alliance grounds. As the incidents of misunderstanding and criticism mount, he will want to assert greater control over the proceedings. Thus, he will “move” the scrum into a more controlled location, with its orderliness and coherent rules. Certainly, Mulroney, like Pearson, followed that progression. (So did Trudeau, although it took him more than one term in office to do so.) Mulroney was just not expected to follow this path as quickly as he did.

An intriguing intermediate position between the unregulated scrum and the highly controlled press conference was the prime minister's use of a portable podium. In March, 1985, Mulroney decided to deliver his press conferences from behind a podium adorned with the Canadian coat of arms. Colin Seymour-Ure, in his trenchant analysis of the presentation of political news, explains the advantages of such a technique:

[It] looks good on the TV screen, and it has practical advantages as a place for notes and papers. It defines a little space around the prime minister and signals the performance of a deliberate communications role. If [the prime minister] cannot carry around his actual briefing room, with its orderliness and zones of demarcation, he can at least carry around a bit of it<sup>29</sup>.

The trouble with the podium was that, to the media, it seemed like a pretence to impress the cameras. The gallery accused Mulroney of adopting a so-called "Presidential style". As Seymour-Ure points out, perhaps journalists implicitly recognized the podium as a sort of "symbolic barrier between the prime minister and themselves"<sup>30</sup>. Mulroney would, soon after, abandon the podium.

A manner of attack common to most administrations was also adopted: verbal attack. Mulroney blamed the press gallery for his low standing in the polls, at one point referring to it as "a cottage industry ... that deals with facile and mostly pejorative references to what any given prime minister is doing". Sinking deeper and deeper in the polls, the federal Conservatives would unleash furious assaults on their tormentors in the gallery.

Since Mulroney attached such an immense importance to the media, the wounds inflicted by journalists appear to have left him with a deep resentment at having been betrayed. Gratton explains: "[Mulroney] started to hold [the media] responsible for all his problems ... I can't remember how often he railed against the media, calling the reporters ignorant fools who didn't

understand anything. Often he was right, and never did it change anything”<sup>31</sup>. Even the staff of the PMO participated in the press-bashing sessions with an enthusiastic fervour. Bernard Roy, the prime minister’s Principal Secretary, referred to journalists as “whores”.

Inevitably, this strategy induced a backlash. At the end of January, 1986, editorialists across the entire nation, were criticizing Mulroney and his office for whining about unfair press coverage. French-speaking commentators, many of whom had been optimistic about the Conservative victory in 1984, became just as critical as English-speaking journalists. Journalistic overviews of the first two years of the Mulroney administration, published in the fall of 1986, labelled Mulroney as the “untrustworthy leader of an unmitigated public relations disaster”. By the end of the year, veteran Ottawa reporter Arch Mackenzie described relations between Mulroney’s press office and the gallery as “trench warfare”.

In 1987, following the much-publicized Oerlikon affair, the Tories once again lashed out at the media. Angry and exasperated, Mulroney and his aides began to constantly telephone publishers, editors and reporters at news organizations, complaining about their coverage. Bill Fox sometimes found himself engaged in heated confrontations with reporters, regarding the tone of their stories.

When supposed “errors” in coverage were committed, the pressure began to have an impact. At Canadian Press, for instance, PMO pressure resulted in a new policy, whereby stories critical of the government had to receive initial clearance through the Toronto head office, prior to being transmitted across the country<sup>32</sup>. Apparently, the PMO applied pressure against many news organizations, including the *CBC*, the *Toronto Sun*, the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Toronto Star*, in early 1987. Stevie Cameron insists that, around this time, Mulroney

also instructed senior managers at *CBC Radio* that they would have to maintain computerized records of airtime given to each party during election periods, as well as code the overall tone of each broadcast as either “negative” or “positive”<sup>33</sup>.

The PMO soon grasped that it could select among the 350 members of the press gallery. “Hostile” commentators were rarely granted access to real decision-makers. Claire Hoy of the *Toronto Sun* claims that Mulroney loved to be praised, but he could not accept criticism and refused to grant interviews to journalists he disliked. Not surprisingly, Hoy was one of the reporters in the gallery considered “negative”, along with *Southam News* columnist Don McGillivray and most the staff of the *Toronto Star*, to name but a few.

Journalists deemed to be “friendly” not only received interviews, but were also, intermittently, fed stories by Mulroney officials, often receiving invitations to special briefings by senior officials. PMO favourites in the anglophone press included columnists who offered depth of coverage and even-handed analysis; essentially, those reporters responsible and fair in their coverage of the government. For favourites, such as George Bain, Douglas Fisher, the *Financial Post*’s Hy Solomon, and *CTV*’s Mike Duffy, access did not pose a problem<sup>34</sup>.

For example, Douglas Fisher had Mulroney on his show on *CTV*’s Ottawa affiliate, *CJOH-TV*, twice during a four-month period in 1985, at a time when most news organizations were encountering serious difficulties in gaining access to the prime minister. In one interview, Fisher apologized to Mulroney for having criticized him upon his arrival in Ottawa and added, “Well, that’s where you turned out to be so bloody good ... I didn’t think anybody could come in and do as well there”<sup>35</sup>. The reciprocal nature of the friendly relationship had suddenly become clear.

The PMO communications strategy represented an authoritarian approach to news management. The Conservative government eventually arrived at the realization that the press gallery was not monolithic; they could not only select among the members of the gallery, but they could also choose the precise *type* of media outlet. Accordingly, Mulroney paid significant attention to television and the elite newspapers, while choosing to largely ignore the less influential print media.

Ingratiation also took the form of the strategic formation of friendships with gallery members. Peter C. Newman was one such friend. Newman was typical of Mulroney's friends in the media: he had never been part of the parliamentary press gallery crowd, even during the years he had worked there. Richard Doyle was another friend and influential journalist cultivated by Mulroney. Other friends in the gallery included Allan Fotheringham, Bob McKenzie of the *Toronto Star*, and Michel Roy of *La Presse*<sup>36</sup>.

Some observers do not attribute the souring of prime minister-media relations during Mulroney's term in office to a cyclical phenomenon. Since 1986, when hostilities between the two sides became so heightened during the Tory reign, a significant amount of literature has been written, exploring the underlying factors for the erosion of relations.

One common explanation is that there is a built-in liberal ideological bias within the ranks of the media. Proponents of this view contend that journalists' own political attitudes served to combine with the collapse of the Liberal Party and the prevalence of a professional scepticism about politicians, to persuade crusading reporters to attack Mulroney at every opportunity. As Douglas Fisher notes, "It seems to me one can only explain the large-scale nastiness of the

media assessment of the Mulroney government in terms of a pervasive anti-conservatism in the press”<sup>37</sup>.

However, an ideological explanation is simply not sufficient. Admittedly, the press gallery has a liberal political orientation. This is quite clear from a 1984-85 study conducted by Peter Snow, a faculty member of the University of Western Ontario’s graduate school of journalism, which revealed that more than 80% of press gallery members confessed to being either “left” or “centre” on the political spectrum. Forty-three percent described themselves as belonging to the political “centre”, while 42% considered themselves to be “left of centre”. Only 4% considered themselves to be “right of centre”<sup>38</sup>.

This clash of ideology with the Tories may explain a *small* part of the rivalry between Mulroney and the media. Yet one cannot reliably construct a significant linkage between journalists’ personal biases and the primary tone of coverage. Such a causal relationship is often espoused by politicians, while in the midst of excessive attacks by the media, simply because it serves an important political purpose: the discrediting of the news media. Charges of “media bias” were recently seen in the U.S., with President George Bush attributing his unsuccessful 1992 re-election bid, in part, to the liberal American media.

Partisanship among journalists has been in steady decline since the Pearson years; even in 1963, press partisanship was no longer a major political force. It certainly was not a significant force during the time of Mulroney’s tenure. Most Canadians feel the same way. In a Financial Times/Decima poll conducted in April 1988, 55% of those people surveyed felt that the personal views of most political journalists were, generally, “centre on the political spectrum”. Only 18% considered the gallery’s views as being “left of centre”.



A major reason why journalists gave Mulroney (and, indeed, all prime ministers) so much trouble can be found in the modern notion that the media and the government of the day are *natural adversaries*, making news journalists the real opposition, rather than members of the second and third parties in the House of Commons. Indeed, when journalists present the news of the government in a critical manner, it seldom has much to do with ideological bias. The gallery is not manned by socialists or Liberals out to “get” the Conservatives. It is manned by journalists who relish the opportunity to oppose *any* administration, regardless of its political colour.

A further explanation advanced is that the negative press was content-driven. The mere substance of the news was, in itself, the main reason for the resulting bitterness towards Mulroney. The tawdry misjudgements and charges of dishonesty aimed at a group of ministers, together with other “unacceptable behaviour”, were the primary source of the resulting tumultuous relationship between the Conservative government and the press gallery.

There is no doubt that the Mulroney government was beset with many scandals. It also seems likely that these scandals were, in part, responsible for the *magnitude* of media criticism of the prime minister. However, it is questionable whether content was the main driving force behind the period of critical coverage itself. One must give serious consideration to the question of whether the gallery would still have been critical if the Tory government had managed to remain scandal-free. It is very likely they would have.

If the cyclical pattern persisted, even if the Mulroney administration had steered clear of scandals, the Ottawa press corps would still have engaged in a discernible period of government criticism. The media would have simply devoted greater attention to Tory

policies. As has been seen, the Trudeau years were largely devoid of political scandal. Yet, for a period of time, the media relentlessly attacked the Liberal government on the basis of their policies, albeit with moderately less force than with the Mulroney government.

Charles Lynch makes a good point: “When there were no new scandals, [the] media rehashed the old ones”<sup>39</sup>. This observation has particular merit. A prime example is the Blais-Grenier affair. Although the uproar over Blais-Grenier’s alleged free trips surfaced in October, 1985, the incident was still being discussed as late as August, 1988 - nearly *three years* after the scandal became public. On August 29, 1988, the *Winnipeg Free Press* featured a full-length piece, recounting every detail of the Blais-Grenier debacle<sup>40</sup>.

An interesting question is how Mulroney, faced with such a hostile press, managed to win such a sweeping victory in 1988, winning an impressive 169 of 295 seats. The answer lies in the amount of influence which one attaches to the contemporary news media. Although some communications theorists assign the media an immensely powerful political role, with the ability to dethrone any government it chooses, the main supporters of this theory are politicians. The prevalent view among politicians is an aggrieved complaint that the press gallery pounces on a government’s mistakes and magnifies them, presenting a distorted picture to the voters, which speedily leads to a change in government.

This is a reasonable assessment of the media’s *behaviour*, but a more moderate view of the press’s impact in the realm of politics is far more convincing. The gallery can, undoubtedly, damage a government and act as a contributing force in its demise. However, it cannot, on its own accord, remove an undesirable government. Observes Senator Gratton O’Leary, “The press gallery can’t bring down a government all by itself, but it ... can hasten the process”.

According to Anthony Westell, media criticism is seldom fatal to an administration: “Governments defeat themselves, and journalists merely lend a helping hand - gleefully, of course”<sup>41</sup>. This must be considered when explaining the Mulroney government’s second electoral victory.

By his third year in office, relations between Mulroney and the media had hardened into cold formality. The Conservatives devised a new strategy of avoidance in September of 1986, prompting Michel Gratton to term Mulroney “the peekabo PM”. Mulroney’s officials announced what was to be a new communications strategy: diverting the prime minister away from the path of the “hostile media”, which they claimed reported only controversy, and ignored the government’s “positive” achievements.

The new approach to the press was designed with the express purpose of minimizing the damage to Mulroney, by “keeping him on the road, out of the country, out in the regions - anywhere but Ottawa. Things were going wrong, and the PM had made it clear that he wanted an approach to communications that would distance him from the disasters, so that was what we did”<sup>42</sup>.

Tory advisers concluded that there was only one way in which the government could survive the scandals - by showing the prime minister in a positive light. This would, in turn, supposedly, entail receiving favourable coverage on television. It was felt that, seeing the prime minister on TV every evening, the voters would identify him with everything that bothered them about the government. Thus, the idea was to reduce Mulroney’s public appearances and avoid the cameras when trouble loomed, only showing the prime minister, at his best, in highly controlled situations.

Although Mulroney had promised to hold bi-monthly press conferences, a formal press conference was not held in the press building amphitheatre from early 1987 until the conclusion of his term. The administration's last news conference in the National Press Theatre would be on January 18, 1987<sup>43</sup> - a date that lends considerable explanation to Mulroney's subsequent aversion for the press theatre. It was the day after the *Montreal Gazette* first reported the Oerlikon affair.

Mulroney elected, instead, to engage the media in a somewhat different way. Upon departing the House of Commons, the prime minister would pause on the stairs leading up to his office to speak, briefly, to reporters. Former cabinet adviser Dalton Camp called this the "helicopter strategy," after the U.S. presidential tendency to hastily retreat at the first hint of a challenging question. *Saturday Night* columnist Charlotte Gray called this "the latest tactic in the power struggle between the prime minister's office and the Ottawa press gallery"<sup>44</sup>.

This technique afforded the prime minister complete control. Mulroney could stop and turn to face the forest of microphones and cameras gathered below, or he could simply ascend the stairs, effectively terminating the scrum. If he disliked a question, he could just ignore or pretend not to hear it, and field another shouted query that he wanted to answer. This degree of control was not available from the traditional press conference, held at the outset of the government's mandate.

Craig McInnes of the *Globe and Mail* wrote an eloquent description of this technique:

The Prime Minister doesn't actually go through the foyer. He steps through the doors, protected by a line of security guards, turns right and heads up the stairs. As he ascends, reporters bark out questions like hounds baying at a fleeting fox. If Mr. Mulroney hears one he wants to answer, he will pause on the stairs and throw a few words back down to the crush of reporters and photographers. Only the quick and well-placed get close enough to hear them. Some days the Prime

Minister seems to hear nothing and goes up the stairs with the questions of reporters falling impotently in his wake<sup>45</sup>.

Reporters despised the new arrangement. “Walking away from those daily scrums, you feel soiled. It’s so demeaning,” remarked Elly Alboim, Ottawa bureau chief of *CBC’s The National*. Yet, ironically, it would be the visuals required by television which would, essentially, guarantee the success of the “helicopter strategy”.

Similar to both Pearson and Trudeau, Brian Mulroney attempted, towards the end of his term, to find a way around the Ottawa press gallery. Mulroney had blamed the gallery for failing to get the Tory message out, claiming that any real achievements made by the Conservative government were, ultimately, overshadowed by critical media coverage of the government. The prime minister said that the gallery was “fairly negative” towards his government and had not given due attention to its “tremendous record” in job creation, national reconciliation, foreign affairs, and , especially, in the economic realm.

The Mulroney government had, in fact, accumulated the finest economic record of any Canadian government in recent history. Unemployment was down, and the dollar up; the deficit was being successfully tackled; and inflation had been brought under control. As well, investment had soared and the nation’s export trade was booming. Yet, the Conservatives received little credit from the Ottawa media. According to journalist Val Sears, Mulroney had become convinced that the press viewed the economic improvements in the country as happening, *despite* what the government did, and not because of it<sup>46</sup>. It is a valid criticism. Several communications theorists, including Frederick Fletcher and Anthony Westell, concur. “[Mr. Mulroney] is substantially right when he argues that the journalists focus on his government’s errors and scandals and pay little attention to its successes,” says Westell.

Advisers to the prime minister insisted that Mulroney had no alternative but to employ the same strategy as his predecessors, Pearson and Trudeau: devise a new communications strategy that would convey the government's story, ungarbled by the gallery's allegedly biased perceptions. Only then, would the *government's* story be conveyed to the public. Mulroney agreed: "We know the problems we're up against with the gallery," he told reporters. "We understand your obligations and we accept our own, and we've got to get our message out and we're going to do it, you can be sure of that".

Mulroney chose to hire Marc Lortie as his new press secretary, in the wake of Michel Gratton's departure in March, 1987. Gratton and Bill Fox had both been journalists and were intensely partisan Tories. Lortie was different. He viewed his role more as providing a service.

What distinguished Mulroney's media relations system under Lortie was the degree to which it was both planned and centralized. While there was a considerable degree of coordination under Trudeau, Mulroney went significantly further, routinely relying upon the cabinet communications committee to plan media strategy. The rationale, according to Lortie, was that

the prime minister wanted to make sure that every time a cabinet was dealing with a policy, the communications aspects would be a factor in the policy. Too often things were announced in an uncoordinated way. If you made two different announcements on the same day about two different policies, very likely one will suffer because the media will cover one announcement and not the other<sup>47</sup>.

The media outlets that were to be targeted, when and where announcements were to be made, and the manner in which information was to be released were planned well in advance. Bill Fox insists that "the reason you plan is so that nothing distorts from or distorts [sic] the message you are trying to put out"<sup>48</sup>.

However, as David Taras points out, despite the centralized flow of government information via the press office, and attempts to stage speaking events in carefully controlled settings where a dignified image could be preserved, Mulroney seemed torn - torn between the formal, ritualized structures of media relations and his life-long desire for affirmation from the journalists covering him. "It appears that he is often tempted to break free of the structures that he himself has created in order to survive in the battleground of media relations," says Taras<sup>49</sup>.

Another means by which the Tory administration tried to bypass the press gallery was the placement of greater emphasis on contact with the regional press. In 1986, as part of the Conservative master plan to bypass the gallery, Transport Minister Don Mazankowski launched a "dial-a-minister" scheme. In an effort to communicate regularly with regional reporters, Mazankowski's office sent out 600 letters to regional media outlets, suggesting they call the minister directly for comments, rather than rely upon national reporters in Ottawa. "Realizing that you are forced to take most of your national news second hand from the daily press and the wire services, we thought you might appreciate getting fresh material directly from this office," wrote press secretary Tom Van Dusen in the letter. "I am also on call should you need to get the minister's comments directly from him".

The Mulroney administration also decided to highlight Tory accomplishments by travelling outside the "Ottawa hothouse" more often. By getting out in the country and courting the small-town media, the government aimed to receive a local hearing: a clear channel of communication, unadulterated by the press gallery. The rationale was that, by making announcements to less critical journalists outside of Ottawa, the prime minister could elude the hostility of the members of the gallery. It was a PMO media-management technique that had

been established well before Mulroney's tenure. Trudeau had used it during his second term in office - what his second term press secretary, Patrick Gossage, has appropriately termed, the "boondocks ploy".

However, the scheme was plagued by problems. On his first trip under the new plan, Mulroney was confronted by about 150 Halifax demonstrators from his old riding of Central Nova. Mulroney was accused of lying when he had stated, prior to his election as prime minister, that he would never forget the people of the Nova Scotia riding for electing him. There was an additional problem. When the local media learned of the strategy, they resented the implication that they were "no-account hicks who, unlike the National Press Gallery, could be conned"<sup>50</sup>. The result was that many of the interviews backfired. The strategy was, accordingly, abandoned.

Of the three governments examined in the paper, the Mulroney administration best exemplifies the cyclical and predictable nature of relations between the prime minister and the press gallery.

Upon gaining a landslide victory in 1984, the media offered relatively subdued support for Mulroney, in comparison to Trudeau. Nonetheless, it was support. During the first couple of months of the term, the press, predictably, devoted their energies towards personality profiles of Mulroney and his family, while the prime minister offered his full cooperation in serving the needs of reporters.

Befalling a similar fate as Lester Pearson, the next three years were witness to several major scandals, the majority involving Quebec cabinet ministers. The gallery attacked Mulroney with a ferocity not seen in either the Pearson or Trudeau eras. In response, Mulroney not only



launched a verbal assault on the press, but he also pressured various news organizations to generate more favourable coverage. News management and ingratiation also constituted key components of the government's competitive approach to the media.

Relations between Mulroney and the press gallery had become quite formal and structured by 1987. Extensive measures were undertaken. Settings became highly controlled as formal news conferences were ended in favour of a new sort of "helicopter scrum", which allowed for an unprecedented degree of prime ministerial control. In addition, the flow of government information was centralized and increased emphasis placed upon regional media outlets, in a desperate attempt to avoid the obstructive filter of the gallery.

## **CONCLUSION**

When Lester Pearson came to power in April, 1963, he was determined to conduct an “open” administration, and avoid the adversarial nature of much of his predecessor’s relations with the press gallery. The hope was that a prolonged, or even permanent “honeymoon” period would prevail. Another Liberal prime minister, Pierre Trudeau, had similar designs upon taking office five years later, but this time, it was out of an intellectual contempt for the gallery, rather than for strategic political gain. In 1984, Brian Mulroney was confident that, by catering to journalists’ every need and taking them into his confidence early into his term, the media would treat his government “fairly”, even as the term progressed and the inevitable controversies arose. However, all attempts would fail, each prime minister’s relationship with the press gallery passing through all of the phases observed in the U.S. by Michael B. Grossman and Martha J. Kumar.

Initial press reaction to Lester Pearson’s victory over Tory John Diefenbaker in 1963 was very favourable, even one of relief. Gallery members, many of whom were already friends with Pearson prior to the election, would be attracted to the prime minister’s pleasant, “easy-going” personality. And, it showed in the sheer volume of flattering “personality stories”, as well as the tendency of journalists to provide a non-analytical account of the Liberal government’s ambitious, but unrealistic, “Sixty Days” policy agenda.

Fully aware that this positive climate would probably not last, Pearson would set out to provide assurances to the Ottawa media that his administration would remain “open”. For the first few months, Pearson delivered on this promise, but, in June, 1963, controversy would assail the government’s very first budget. The “war” with the media had begun.

Within the next four years, there would be numerous confrontations between the prime minister and the media. The Pearson administration was the subject of a number of scandals, the most famous (or, rather, infamous) being the Munsinger affair. Other sources of critical media coverage included the Rivard affair and the calling of the 1965 election.

Within months, reporters revised and even reversed their attitudes towards Pearson and the Liberal administration. Running throughout all press commentary on the various scandals was the notion that Pearson was a weak leader, ill-equipped to manage a government, as editorial after editorial blasted Pearson for lacking the courage to dismiss “inappropriate” ministers of his cabinet.

Against his word, Pearson would try several news management techniques. In an effort to regain some measure of control over the political agenda, media “scrums” were replaced with formal news conferences and leaks were routinely planted. As well as engaging in several methods of ingratiation, including the use of direct favours and personal friendships, Pearson directly attacked the media. There is sufficient reason to believe that Pearson attacked the *CBC* on two different fronts: the documentary, “Mr. Pearson,” and the television program, “This Hour Has Seven Days”.

1966 marked a crucial turning point in the relationship between the prime minister and the press gallery. As tensions were allowed to subside, relations between the two sides became visibly more distant and detached. A strategy of avoidance was undertaken by Pearson, whereby formal press conferences were ended, and reporters, ultimately, banned from working in the lobbies of Parliament. Pearson went further. In addition to relying upon regional press

to transmit political messages, the prime minister used live television to disseminate information - never before attempted in Canada.

With the election of Pierre Trudeau in 1968, and the ensuing “Trudeaumania” phenomenon, it appeared that prime minister-media relations would deviate, in a fundamental way, from that of Pearson and U.S. presidents. However, in the end, Trudeau’s relations with the press gallery went through all of the periods of the cycle outlined by Grossman and Kumar.

The gallery’s fascination with Trudeau originated well before he took office and would continue well into the term - three years into his mandate. Stories focused on Trudeau, the person: his outrageous adventures; the way in which he played to the crowds; his quirky demeanour. The expectations of the media for this new “political messiah” were exceedingly high. Therefore, vague declarations about a desire for a “just society” and “participatory democracy”<sup>1</sup> were greeted with hope, rather than with derision.

The respect was mutual, as information was the most readily available, and access the greatest, during the period of Trudeau’s tenure. However, accomodation of the media by the government did not last long. Within just weeks of taking office, the prime minister began to treat journalists with outright contempt; there was little room for the press in the rational model of government established by Trudeau.

Through various means of manipulating the news, the Trudeau government sought to ensure that the meddlesome gallery did not interfere with the operation of the government. As well as cutting off all staff contacts with the media, Trudeau devoted a lot of energy towards plugging and tracking down leaks within his administration.

Reminiscent of the Pearson years, the *CBC* was, once again, a focal point of attack. Not only did Trudeau verbally threaten the *CBC*, but he would also threaten to scrap *Radio Canada* Canada for its perceived separatist bias. Similar to Pearson the government also severely restricted media access as a means of gaining firm control in the prime minister-media relationship.

Eventually, in 1970, relations between the press gallery and the prime minister fell into the predictable cyclical pattern. With little scandalous material or controversial personalities to report on, the gallery were, eventually, relegated to criticizing various policy developments. Economic policies - related mainly to unemployment and foreign ownership, received the greatest amount of adverse press commentary. A profound sense of disappointment would become prevalent among journalists in the capital - a sense that their "messiah" had somehow let them, and the country, down. Such an outcome may have been inevitable. The interesting aspect of the media's reaction was the lengthy delay of its appearance, which was primarily a function of the prime minister's ideal suitability to television and the media's resulting dependence upon him.

There was also a period of detachment near the conclusion of Trudeau's term. Predictably, contacts between the prime minister and reporters became even less frequent than the previous years. In fact, contact became almost non-existent. This deliberate move by the Liberal government was best seen in the 1972 election campaign at the end of Trudeau's term.

It is important to realize that, while unusual, neither Trudeau's premature confrontational stance, nor the media's prolonged infatuation with the prime minister, represent a violation of the American cycle outlined by Grossman and Kumar. The timing of the phases are not

traditional, but the relationship, nonetheless, is characterized by the same recurring stages described by Grossman and Kumar: an “alliance” phase; a “competitive” phase; and, finally, a period of “detachment”.

In September, 1984, the new Progressive Conservative government swept into power with a clear mandate for change. Initial media reaction to Brian Mulroney did not reach the fervour pitch witnessed with the election of Trudeau - it did not even approach that level. However, for the first couple of months of the term, the press gallery did as they had done during the initial period of the Pearson and Trudeau administrations: focus upon personality stories and family, with only a limited descriptive discussion of party policy objectives. It was not so much a function of the Ottawa press’s adoration of Mulroney, as it was a feeling of relief at Trudeau’s exit and an exactment of revenge on their old Liberal foe.

When the Mulroney government became embroiled in a succession of scandals, the Ottawa news media became vicious. First, there was the tuna scandal. Two weeks later came the Blais-Grenier affair. In total, the Conservative government would be the target of six major scandals, each of which would induce the media to call for Mulroney’s immediate resignation. The FTA represented the only major development during this period which managed to escape gallery criticism.

Mulroney was equally fierce in his response to the gallery’s new competitive spirit, employing nearly the complete arsenal of tools at his disposal. Attack took the form of the application of constant pressure to news organizations critical of the Tory government, as well as a verbal lashing. In terms of news management, a “gag rule” was instituted for public

servants, followed, the next year, by the replacement of media “scrums” with formal news conferences.

Mulroney would also master the art of ingratiating, assiduously cultivating friendships with members of the gallery. In addition, access to major decision-makers became contingent upon whether a reporter was deemed “hostile” or “friendly”, *and* whether he or she represented television and the elite newspapers, or the less desirable print media. Among the three administrations examined in the paper, the Mulroney administration is unique in this latter distinction.

By late 1986, relations between the two sides had hardened. Convinced that the media had deliberately ignored his government’s successes in favour of sensationalist material, a new communications strategy was devised. Mulroney sought to stay out of the capital and, thus, escape the hostile press gallery.

The media attack on Mulroney has produced the inevitable question: ‘why?’ None of the explanations is convincing. An ideological explanation - that it was, primarily, an attack by the “liberal” media establishment against the “right-wing” Tories - is weak for the simple reason that such a conclusive linkage cannot, reliably, be made. It is a myth perpetuated by politicians, used usually during the competitive phase, to discredit the media. Mulroney perpetuated this very myth.

Another suggested rationale for the criticism of Mulroney is that it was a content-driven phenomenon. The fact that the Tory government had become entangled in so many scandals was enough to incite such an adversarial reportorial response. Content may explain a *small* part of the gallery’s shift to critical reporting. But, it is not a sufficient explanation. A major



reason why the scandals, collectively, acquired such public prominence was the practice, by the media, of simply dredging up old scandals in the absence of new ones. The tension between Mulroney and the media was, in large measure, a function of the persistent cyclical character of relations between the two sides.

The Grossman and Kumar approach has significant utility. Yet, there are some interesting differences between their American analysis and the findings of this study. The most obvious difference lies in the Canadian linguistic duality; the French-language news media differ, fundamentally, from the English-language press. The francophone media in Quebec possess a unique definition of “news”, in that they do not deem controversies involving a politician’s personal life to be “newsworthy”; the English-language press very much consider this “news” and report on it incessantly. The Quebec media’s behaviour, in this respect, may be linked with the province’s earlier experiences with political corruption and, in particular, with former premier Maurice Duplessis.

There also seems to be considerable merit in Anthony Westell’s claim of the existence of “waves” within each recurring period of the prime minister-media relationship. In the competitive phase during both the Pearson and Trudeau administrations, there were, in fact, instances of the gallery drawing back from their critical tendencies. Grossman and Kumar make no mention of this phenomenon. This may also be the case in the U.S., but no literature has yet addressed Westell’s “wave” theory.

An interesting variation is also evident in the *administration’s* response to the media, as observed in Canada and the U.S. The nature of news management in Canada is not the same as it is in the U.S. For instance, American administrations tend to employ the various news

management tactics with reckless abandon: blunt and overt. The Nixon administration's public attempt to block the *New York Times* from printing a series of stories on the origins of U.S. involvement in Vietnam is one of the most extreme examples, but there are others (According to Walter Stewart, Arthur Silvester, a U.S. Defence Department spokesman during the Nixon administration, even defended the government's right to tell outright lies to the press in the name of "national interest")<sup>2</sup>.

In Canada, news management techniques are crude too; however, not quite that crude. Trudeau's threats to the *CBC* and *Radio Canada* represented blatant attempts at managing the news. But such cases are rare in Canada, as opposed to the U.S. where, as journalist Walter Stewart says, "correspondents aren't merely misled but lied to as a matter of government policy". Stewart exaggerates, but his point is a good one.

Although the conclusions reached here are very tentative, they nonetheless strongly suggest a cycle - a clear and persistent pattern. The findings presented and analyzed here may assist in shedding light on the problem of understanding the behaviour of media and government and and in the constitution of reasonable discussion regarding it.

Further study of the questions raised here, particularly more empirical studies, would be useful for the simple reason that the tentative conclusions and observations made in this paper could be extended and, perhaps, even solidified. Only through more exhaustive research methods will a more full and complete understanding of this cyclical phenomenon and its political implications be attained. The employment of an alternative methodology to traditional content analysis - one which is superior to content analysis - would be preferable.

However, it is questionable whether such a method even exists. Further work must be done in this connection.

Today, there is a pervasive sense of unease around Ottawa that prime minister-press gallery relations are so venomous that no one's interests are being served. However, is there genuine reason for concern? U.S. journalist Richard Reeves would say 'no'. And, he presents a very convincing argument - one which encompasses the core of Grossman and Kumar's theory.

In his excellent account of U.S. President Gerald Ford's relations with White House reporters, Reeves discusses this very issue:

The trumpeted adversary relationship between reporters and the people they cover has always been more sound than fury ... There is, however, inevitable tension between press and politicians; they are forced to work and march together, but they have different jobs and hear different drummers. Tension may be mistaken for struggle, but it does not necessarily make adversaries; in this case it only makes press and politicians loving and hating partners in a marriage of necessity<sup>3</sup>.

It is a remarkably astute observation: one which could easily be applied to politics in Canada.

Allan Fotheringham alludes to a similar mythical "battle" between the two sides in Canada. "The myth that must be dispelled is that there is an all-out war being conducted here," writes Fotheringham. "That is the public perception - that the two implacable foes are in a constant state of hatred"<sup>4</sup>. However, he claims that the relationship between the press and politicians is a love-hate relationship - a "marriage of convenience" between the two dependent partners:

The politicians need the press for coverage, to manipulate them, to use them as a twisted mirror. The press need the politicians, for they are the meal ticket, the reason for existence ... the pols [sic] and the press are in an industry together. They live off one another. They war, but in the great scheme of things, it is a pretend war. They need each other. Birds of a feather<sup>5</sup>.

As Reeves says, mutual need outweighs mutual hostility; the government needs to tell its story and the media needs to fill its screens, pages and airwaves. In Canada, the prime minister and the media are locked into a similar symbiotic partnership, and if the experiences of recent past administrations are any indication, they will continue to be for a long time to come.

## ENDNOTES

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