

# Brian Mulroney's well-deserved Churchill Society honours



On Nov. 30, the 147th birthday of Winston Churchill, the Churchill Society, which continues to honour his name around the world and is well represented across Canada, conferred an award named after Churchill for the promotion of democracy upon Brian Mulroney. Out of long friendship and high respect for our 18th prime minister and from my great admiration for Churchill and appreciation of the Churchill Society, where I have had the honour of speaking on a number of occasions, I immediately accepted an invitation to attend. The keynote speech, by the recipient, was outstanding and was one of the greatest addresses, I believe, in Brian Mulroney's public career of nearly 50 years. He was eloquently introduced by the leader of the official Opposition, Erin O'Toole. There were more or less lengthy commendations on film from an eclectic

range of retired politicians: Sheila Copps, Ed Broadbent, Hugh Segal and the former director of the Munk Centre, the learned and articulate Janice Stein.

Their compliments to the honouree were well chosen. For the first time in many years, Copps did not remind me of John Crosbie's famous description of her as "the captain of a women's industrial league bowling team." Segal loquaciously recalled the often overlooked fact that Brian Mulroney was a masterly guardian of the support of his parliamentary caucus. Even when unjust and fickle public opinion was unfavourable, there was no wavering in the ranks of his parliamentary followers, who, under most leaders, waffle and quaver as soon as the polls soften. Broadbent's praise of Mulroney's reparations to the Japanese-Canadians who were so shamefully detained and largely deprived of their property after Japan initiated the war in the Pacific in December 1941, was entirely deserved. (This disgraceful policy was originally just an imitation of the Americans, who put the West Coast Japanese in detention camps, though, hypocritically, not the more numerous Japanese in the Hawaiian islands, who were in the war zone. All of America's greatest liberals, from Franklin D. Roosevelt through Felix Frankfurter and William O. Douglas upheld this outrage. The chief opponent of it, in one of modern American history's more wilfully forgotten episodes, was the long-time FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, who remonstrated against the absence of any due process at all for these scores of thousands of American citizens.)

Nov. 30 was, as Churchill Society dinners always are, an enjoyable occasion, and some things that were not said were as conspicuous as those that were. The venerable Prof. Peter Russell, an Indigenous affairs expert, gave the now obligatory reference to us being on native land, and he referred respectfully to the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which was established by Mulroney. Russell rightly congratulated the former prime minister for his

recognition of Indigenous rights and grievances, but the royal commission that he lauded produced the preposterous recommendation that a vast chunk of Canada be given as a sovereign entity to the First Nations scattered throughout the country and comprising about five per cent of the total population. Not even the leaders of the Native victimhood industry have demanded the adoption of its recommendations.

There was much praise for Mulroney's opposition to the apartheid government of South Africa, but also some unjust criticism of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and U.S. President Ronald Reagan for being less enthusiastic about sanctions on that country. Thatcher described it as an "evil and repulsive regime," but said that she did not see how "we can make things better by making them worse." Both she and President Reagan thought that the Zulu leader, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, should have been a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize with F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela, and both thought that de Klerk should have been permitted to proceed with his original plan for a bicameral legislature in which the lower house would be composed of proportionally representative legislators and the upper house would have equal representation from each of what de Klerk called "the constituent cultures" of South Africa. We may see from the shambles that the African National Congress has made of that magnificent country that we might have done better to put less pressure on de Klerk. There was unfortunately no mention of Mulroney's heroic assistance in the Ethiopian famine and his help in combating AIDS in Africa. He is personally responsible for the survival of hundreds of thousands of people who would have perished without him.

The honouree and his introducer and several others offered some comments in French. It was clearly not the occasion for a diversion into discussion of the state of Canada's official languages. And it was just as well not to lament that neither the Mulroney government's ardently pursued Meech Lake or

Charlottetown accords were adopted (I was not myself a particularly strenuous supporter of them at the time), but it would not have been inappropriate to mention Mulroney's lifelong dedication to biculturalism and official language minority rights throughout the country, especially as the government of Quebec, with the full approval of all of the federal parties, is now conducting what I am confident would be called a "cultural genocide" – if it were happening to another language – against English in Quebec.

In his remarks, Mulroney produced a series of very apt quotations from Churchill and concluded with a direct citation from the war memoirs of Gen. Charles de Gaulle, in which the general expressed his high respect for the British leader. He did not repeat de Gaulle's comment on the scandalous defeat of Churchill at the polls in 1945, but he could have, particularly as it also has some applicability to post-Mulroney Canada. De Gaulle wrote: "Winston Churchill lost neither his glory nor his popularity thereby, only the adherence he had won as guide and symbol of the nation in peril. His nature, identified with a magnificent enterprise; his countenance, etched by the fires and frosts of great events, were no longer adequate to the era of mediocrity." Everything is to scale, but some of that could be said of Brian Mulroney. He did refer to W.E. Gladstone forming a government at the age of 82, Mulroney's current age. When Gladstone returned to office for the fourth time, the unappreciative Queen Victoria said, "Not that bore again!" As I witnessed on Nov. 30 in Toronto, Canada's reaction to Mulroney's return would be one of thanksgiving.

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