

## Moving on from Mulroney

L. Ian Macdonald, National Post

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He plays on the Old Timers' circuit now, but Brian Mulroney still has a few moves and can put on a show.

Or as Rocket Richard once said to Dickie Moore, explaining why he didn't pass the puck more in an Old Timers' game: "The people want to see me put the puck in the net."

It's hard to know how many goals Mulroney has scored in his first three days of testimony before the Oliphant Inquiry into his dealings with Karlheinz Schreiber. In his first two days on the ice, Mulroney's counsel, Guy Pratte, was trying to set him up in front of the net. It's a different game with lead commission counsel Richard Wolson, who has been taking the former prime minister into the boards.

Assuming Wolson finishes with Mulroney today as scheduled, the question will become, what do we know that we didn't know before, and has it been worth \$14-million of taxpayers' money to find out?

Over to you, Mr. Commissioner. It will be up to Jeffrey Oliphant to sort through it all and determine whether Mulroney's cash retainer with Schreiber was a public or private transaction, and whether rules or ethical standards were broken in the process.

The public have their own views. In a Nanos Research poll this week, they were evenly divided on the necessity of the inquiry, but clear in their view of it is a waste of money --nearly two Canadians in three, 63%, thought it was a very poor (45%) or poor (18%) use of taxpayer dollars.

They've probably come to their own conclusions about Mulroney -- that he shouldn't have accepted cash, that, as he put it, "I should have asked for a cheque."

In other words, he made a mistake and has paid for it many times over in embarrassment, aggravation and legal fees. It was the most expensive \$225,000 he ever made. He was wrong to even meet with a character like Schreiber, let alone do business with him after leaving office in 1993. Mulroney has acknowledged as much in the past, and apologized for it, as he did again this week.

Bloggers and those who have made a career from this story may not be able to get past it, but there is a sense that the country has drawn its own conclusions and moved on.

Even for Mulroney, who used to be pretty good at filling the stands, there have been empty chairs in the public gallery at the hearings in the Old Ottawa City Hall this week. An adjacent room set up for

overflow viewing has been empty. The live cable coverage is no ratings threat to Regis in the morning or Oprah in the afternoon.

What have journalists learned about Mulronev this week? That he likes the air conditioning cranked up. Reporters have noted, and even complained about, how cold it is in the hearing room, observing that Mila Mulronev has been wearing gloves to keep her hands warm.

The reason is no mystery: The television lights are hot, causing Mulronev to perspire, so he prefers to work in a cold room. No sweat. The inquiry was happy to oblige. This is not the first time this has happened. At the marathon Meech Lake negotiation in the Langevin Block in June, 1987, premiers complained that the room was too cold. One of them even came prepared. Robert Bourassa, who preferred hot rooms, opened his briefcase and pulled out a sweater.

Really, Mulronev has been speaking to an audience of one: Oliphant, who has extended him every courtesy, and even shared moments of humour. At the end of the day, it's this connection, and this impression, that counts. - L. Ian MacDonald is editor of Policy Options magazine. He was chief speech-writer to prime minister Brian Mulronev from 1985 to 1988.