



The History of Canada Series-The Last Act: Pierre Trudeau: The Gang Of Eight And The Fight For Canada

Ron Graham

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Between the morning of Wednesday, November 4, and the morning of Thursday, November 5, 1981, a fateful drama unfolded that changed Canada forever.

In one last attempt to renew the constitution with the consent of the provinces, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau met behind closed doors in Ottawa with the ten premiers. It was the culmination of more than five decades of constitutional wrangling, and has been called the most important conference since the Fathers of Confederation got together in Quebec City in 1864. Faced with the threat of Quebec independence, the ambitions of Western Canada, and the provinces' demands for more power, Trudeau was embattled. But he was fiercely determined to make Canadians fully independent and to entrench a Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

What happened that day still reverberates. It severed the last important link to Canada's colonial past. It guaranteed individual liberty and minority rights in the future. It weakened the grip of the elites and gave ownership of the constitution to Canadians. But it came at a price.

Quebec alone refused to sign the final deal. René Lévesque, its separatist premier, claimed he had been betrayed by his allies in the Gang of Eight. The legend of the "Night of the Long Knives" took hold, precipitating a series of events that came close to destroying the country.

Thirty years later, author Ron Graham delivers a gripping account of the fractious debates and secret negotiations. He uses newly uncovered documents and the candid recollections of many of the key participants to create a vivid record of that momentous twenty-four hours. Authoritative and engaging, *The Last Act* is a remarkable combination of scholarly research and historical narrative.

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