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## New Harper lawyer once represented Mulroney; Change of counsel described as a 'non-event' in PM's lawsuit against Liberal Party over bribery allegations

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OTTAWA -- When it comes to defending a Tory Prime Minister fuming over audiotapes, lawyer David Wingfield can now add a second entry to his resumé.

He was first called upon when a bombshell audio of a cursing Brian Mulroney surfaced in connection with a 2005 book called *The Secret Mulroney Tapes*.

The former prime minister said he felt betrayed and devastated.

The Toronto lawyer with WeirFoulds LLP was brought in to sue author Peter C. Newman on Mr. Mulroney's behalf.

Now, Mr. Wingfield is back in the political sphere, this time as Prime Minister Stephen Harper's new lawyer in a civil suit replete with allegations of bribery and spliced audiotapes.

Conservatives refused to explain yesterday why Mr. Harper suddenly changed lawyers in his lawsuit against the Liberal Party over the Chuck Cadman affair.

But Conservative Party lawyer Arthur Hamilton - who was fielding all questions on the matter yesterday - dismissed Liberal suggestions that the shakeup was a sign Mr. Harper's case had run into trouble.

Mr. Hamilton insisted the change of lawyers on Monday was a "non-event."

"Getting into the 'why?' doesn't really get us anywhere," Mr. Hamilton said. "This is such a non-event in the course of a litigation where counsel change from one to another. It has nothing to do with the substance of a case."

Mr. Harper is suing the Liberal Party over allegations that Conservative Party officials offered dying independent MP Chuck Cadman a \$1-million life insurance policy in exchange for his key vote on a confidence matter that could have defeated the Paul Martin Liberal government in 2005.

A key point of dispute in the case is an audio recording of an interview Mr. Harper gave in Mr. Cadman's driveway to a B.C. journalist in which he says "financial considerations" were discussed with Mr. Cadman before the vote.

On Monday, a formal notice was filed in court indicating Mr. Harper has replaced Ottawa lawyers Richard Dearden and Wendy Wagner of Gowling Lafleur Henderson LLP with Toronto lawyers David Wingfield and Paul Guy of WeirFoulds LLP.

Before that, the lawyers representing the Liberal Party say they took part in a conference call in which Mr. Dearden verbally gave notice that he was withdrawing from the case. They say Mr. Dearden followed that up with a written notice of withdrawal, but that document has not been filed in court.

"Rick would not have said he was withdrawing if in fact he had been terminated," said Chris Paliare, the lead lawyer for the Liberals.

Mr. Paliare said it wouldn't make sense that Mr. Harper would simply want to replace Mr. Dearden with someone with experience defending Mr. Mulroney.

"Rick Dearden would be considered in the upper-echelon of defamation lawyers in the country," he said.

Mr. Paliare said the lawsuit is only a fraction of the way through the process and could lead to a trial next year that would last several weeks.

Mr. Hamilton, the Conservative lawyer, said no information will be offered as to why Mr. Harper changed lawyers, because those details are protected by solicitor-client privilege.

For instance, Mr. Hamilton would not say whether the experience of the two new lawyers in working for Mr. Mulroney was a factor in the change.

Mr. Mulroney's suit against Mr. Newman was settled out of court in 2006.

Mr. Wingfield's colleague, Mr. Guy, worked for Mr. Mulroney in what his website describes as a successful lawsuit in defence of a breach of contract claim brought by German-Canadian businessman Karlheinz Schreiber.

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