FROM SWINGER TO STATESMAN — CANADA COMES OF AGE IN THE TIME OF PIERRE ELLIOTT TRUDEAU

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The Gazette, Montreal

Pierre Elliott Trudeau, prime minister from 1968 to 1979 and from 1980 to 1984. He left a more tolerant, generous Canada, but also one deeply in debt.

Pierre Trudeau burst on the scene in the spring of 1968, in a season known as a Trudeaumania. "Why not? It's spring," he declared when a young female fan asked for a kiss. He famously proclaimed a vision of a "just society" in which the law would be an instrument of social tolerance, and economics a means of redistributing wealth. As a result, he left Canada a more tolerant and generous society, but one deeply in debt — the federal debt increased by over 1,000 percent during the Trudeau years. He pledged to put "Quebec in its place," but insisted "its place is in Canada." In the *Official Languages Act* of 1969, he did just that, sparking a decade-long backlash in English-speaking Canada in the 1970s, a controversy that today seems as dim and distant as the one over the Canadian flag in the 1960s. Hero of the 1980 referendum, he seized on the result to deliver a promise of constitutional change, which he realized in 1981-82 by patriating the Constitution with an entrenched Charter of Rights. On the world scene, he pursued the North-South dialogue and his 1983 peace initiative in an attempt to lower the temperature of the arms race. When he left office, after four terms and 15 years, the swinger had become a statesman. Michael B. Stein and Janice Gross Stein reflect on the 15th prime minister and conclude his time was a coming of age for Canada.

Pierre Elliott Trudeau a pris la scène politique d'assaut au printemps de 1968, en cette mémorable saison où la « trudeaumanie » a déferlé sur tout le pays. «Pourquoi pas, puisque c'est le printemps », répondit-il d'ailleurs à une jeune admiratrice qui sollicitait un baiser. Selon sa célèbre vision d'une « société juste », la loi se devait d'être l'instrument d'une plus grande tolérance sociale et l'économie un moyen de redistribuer la richesse. Et de fait, le Canada est devenu sous son règne une société plus ouverte et plus généreuse, quoique sérieusement endettée : les années Trudeau ont vu la dette fédérale augmenter de 1 000 p. 100. Il voulait aussi donner au Québec la place qui lui revenait, insistant toutefois pour que ce soit dans le cadre fédéral. Comme le confirma la Loi sur les langues officielles de 1969, qui déclencha au Canada anglais une vive réaction qui se prolongea une décennie durant et semble aujourd'hui aussi lointaine que la controverse sur le drapeau canadien des années 1960. Héros du référendum de 1980, il promit des changements constitutionnels en cas de victoire du non et remplit sa promesse en 1981-1982, rapatriant la Constitution et y adjoignant une charte des droits et libertés. Sur la scène internationale, il intensifia le dialogue Nord-Sud et lança en 1983 une initiative de paix visant à réfréner la course aux armements. Quittant ses fonctions à l'issue de quatre mandats et 15 années de pouvoir, le noceur avait acquis la stature d'un homme d'État. Michael B. Stein et Janice Gross Stein analysent le parcours du quinzième premier ministre du pays et estiment qu'il a permis au Canada d'accéder à la maturité.

Pierre Elliott Trudeau became prime minister in 1968 in an unparalleled *frisson* of public excitement. Brilliant, dashing, unconventional, fluently bilingual, the new prime minister was a magnet that drew public interest. Canada had a prime minister whose lifestyle was unconventional, who dazzled in conversation, whose intellect sparkled, and who delighted in challenging intellectual and social convention. Trudeau was broadly travelled, worldly, and had come to office with few of the traditional political debts candidates generally accumulate. Looking at their new prime minister, Canadians themselves felt less conventional and more engaged. Truly, a new era was beginning.

Trudeau came to the prime ministership with deeply held views about both domestic and foreign policy. As a francophone from Quebec, he, like many others, was preoccupied with the role of French Canadians in Quebec and in Canada. Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, he bitterly opposed the growing sovereignist movement. His deeply held liberal individualist values shaped his strong opposition to Quebec nationalism and led him to devise policies which gave Quebecers a prominent and visible role in Canadian politics. At the same time, he was committed to deepening the rights of all Canadians. He believed passionately that Canada could distinguish itself through its bilingual and multicultural personality.

Trudeau is probably most closely identified with the search for constitutional reform in Canada in response to the threat posed by the sovereignist movement in Quebec. For a long time, it seemed a fruitless undertaking. His commitment to constitutional reform began even before he became prime minister in 1968. Almost immediately after his convincing election victory later that year, he launched a three-year constitutional round that culminated in the failed Victoria Accord in 1971. He tried again and again over the next several years, until he finally succeeded in patriating the Constitution in 1982. For the first time in their history, Canadians could now amend their Constitution through their own parliamentary institutions. Canada had finally come of age. But Trudeau's dream was only partially fulfilled: Quebec remained outside the process and embittered, and the amending formula proved so rigid that it has been difficult to use on all but the smallest issues.

The Charter of Rights is undoubtedly Trudeau's most significant and enduring constitutional legacy. Both fundamental individual and collective minority rights of citizens were entrenched in a renewed constitution. The Charter has had an extraordinary impact on the attitudes of Canadians toward their system of government. It transformed a highly deferential mass political culture into one that is much more challenging of our political elites and more vigilant about the functioning of Canadian democracy. Those groups whose equality rights were formally guaranteed — Aboriginal groups, women, religious groups, and French language and ethnic minorities — have formed associations dedicated to protecting and advancing these rights in the political and legal systems. These "Charter groups," with support provided by sympathetic members of the legal and academic communities, formed what has been aptly called "the Court Party," and subsequently spearheaded a dramatic rights revolution in Canada. The Charter has prompted not only significant legal changes, but also demands for much broader popular participation and governmental accountability in Canadian political institutions. In a deep sense, the landscape of Canadian political participation was fundamentally altered by the culture that the Charter created.

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Trudeau also hoped that the Charter would solidify national unity and combat the appeal of the indépendentistes in Quebec by focusing the loyalties and political attachments of Quebecers on their national government. These hopes were not realized. A majority favoured their provincial Bill of Rights, which provided many of the same protections for individual citizens. And they looked to the override clause (Section 33) as the ultimate guarantee of their language and culture.

A second major and lasting contribution was Trudeau's transformation of French-English relations into a more representative and equal political partnership. The *Official Languages Act*, passed in 1969, was designed to enhance official bilingualism in the upper echelons of the federal public service by requiring those officials who were not fully bilingual in one of Canada's two official languages to take linguistic training. It was intended as well to produce a more representative and equitable balance between those of French and English mother tongues in leading positions in the civil and military bureaucracy. Trudeau also promoted more French-speaking politicians to top positions in the federal cabinet, the foreign service and federal government commissions and advisory bodies. He supported the wider use of French in federal and provincial legislatures, the courts, and other major political institutions. And he encouraged the construction and financial support of French-language schools and immersion programs in areas of Canada in which there were sufficient numbers and a large enough demand.

At the time, many opposed policies of official bilingualism as impractical or even pernicious. Decades later, it is clear that, at the senior levels, these measures did transform the federal public service into a far more bilingual institution. They did not, however, dramatically increase the number of Canadians claiming to be fluent in the other official language. Nor did they significantly increase the use of the minority language, French or English, in the legislatures and courts of most provinces. But they did alter the widespread perception of many Canadians, both English and French, that Canada is essentially a unilingual English nation. They also helped to make many more French-speaking Canadians, both within and outside Quebec, more comfortable about using their mother tongue in their public and private sector activities. Most important, they helped to cultivate mutual respect between the French and English language communities, and a greater sensitivity to the other community's linguistic and cultural priorities and needs. In this sense, they profoundly changed the way Canadians think of

their country and changed the face Canada shows to the world.

Trudeau succeeded least in economic and social policy, a critical test of any leader's performance. In his economic philosophy, Trudeau was a moderate left liberal, a follower of the ideas of Keynes and Galbraith. He had studied for brief periods at Oxford and Harvard at a time when these economic ideas were still prevalent within the academic community. But he was disinterested in the more arcane and abstract theoretical aspects of the "dismal science," and brought to his economic decision-making a strong desire to promote the goals of increased economic justice and equality. He therefore pursued an economic agenda of state-directed demand management and low unemployment, at a cost of incurring large budgetary deficits and long-term economic debt.

In the immediate post-World War period, this strategy was workable, since the growth rate was high, and unemployment and inflation rates were low. But when Trudeau became prime minister, this postwar economic growth and prosperity had begun to decline, and by the mid-1970s, it had produced double-digit unemployment and inflation. In a period of "stagflation," Trudeau imposed wage and price controls shortly after he had won re-election on a platform strongly opposing these measures. These policies had only marginal success, and provoked strong criticism and disaffection. At the same time, he had to wrestle with high global market energy prices, which contributed to large windfall profits for oil and gas companies and the government of Alberta. Trudeau introduced the National Energy Program to maintain energy prices for the oil-importing provinces of central Canada at a level below world prices. This unpopular policy cost him whatever little electoral support he retained in the West, and soon after, it was abandoned entirely. When he left office in 1984, Canada had a cumulative debt of over $200 billion—a ten-fold increase from 1968, and was in a vulnerable position with international bond-rating agencies and currency markets.

In social policy, Trudeau consolidated rather than innovated. Perhaps his greatest achievement was to impose curbs on the increasingly large federal government expenditures on the universal publicly funded health care system that his predecessor, Lester B. Pearson, had initiated through the *Medicare Act* of 1966. In 1977 Trudeau altered the financial structure of this program from a conditional cost-sharing arrangement, in which the federal government contributed up to 50 percent of the rapidly expanding health care costs, to an unconditional block funding transfer. This change greatly reduced federal government health care (and higher education) payments in return for greater provincial government autonomy in the administration of these transfers. However, provincial governments exploited their autonomy to permit user fees and physician overbilling. The *Canada Health Act* of 1984, passed in Trudeau's last year in office, imposed strict penalties on these violations. These stringent measures did help to preserve the universal health care system, which has remained one of Canada's proudest political accomplishments and its most popular social program.

In other areas of social policy Trudeau left no unique legacy. His health minister Marc Lalonde, a close confidante, did try to develop a guaranteed minimum income program, but eventually abandoned the attempt because of insufficient federal government financial resources. In striking contrast to the remarkable activity during the Pearson era on post-secondary education, social assistance, the Canada Pension Plan, and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, there was no significant innovation in social policy during the Trudeau years.

Prime ministers are also responsible for foreign policy, and Trudeau came to office predictably impatient with the established clichés. We were not designated eternally by providence to play a role of "helpful fixer" within the established rules of Cold War international politics. We were more than a quiescent ally, and our foreign policy could no longer be animated principally by the smoothing out of ripples between the two lodestars of Britain and the United States. Canada was a bilingual and multicultural country and, Trudeau argued, its foreign policy should reflect its interests. How did the prime minister define these interests?

His words are eerily contemporary. The most serious threat to international peace came not from the Soviet Union or from Communism, but from the relentless accumulation of weapons of mass destruction, at that time by the two superpowers, and from the growing gap between the comfortable North and the impoverished South. It was overwhelmingly in Canada's interest to promote arms control and nuclear arms reduction, and to enhance the opportunities for the South to develop. Although the prime minister took special delight in posing as a realist and in using the tough language of national interest, he promoted the liberal values of peace, justice and equity in foreign policy as he did in domestic policy.

If that were all he had done, we would remember him as one in a series of Canadian leaders who pursued laudable purposes with limited capacity and mod-

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In one of the last photos of Lester B. Pearson, the former prime minister greets Margaret and Pierre Trudeau at the Team Canada-USSR hockey series at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto on September 4, 1972.

est effect. But there was nothing modest about Trudeau's foreign policy. He actively represented Canada abroad as a bilingual and multicultural society, open to the world, not only to Europe. Trudeau understood that Canadians would see their own face in the image that they presented to the world. As he did in his domestic policies, the prime minister etched out a new identity for Canada abroad. Indeed, long before the language of globalization became a cliché, Trudeau connected the threads between foreign and domestic policy in a seamless way.

Trudeau found the rigid categories of the Cold War suffocating and he worked to blur the boundaries of the Cold War divisions that were radiating around the globe. One of his first acts as prime minister was to recognize the People's Republic of China in 1970, even before Henry Kissinger's "ping-pong diplomacy" opened the door for Richard Nixon's historic visit to China in 1972. It made little sense to Trudeau that an emerging great power in Asia, with the largest population in the world, should be excluded from international institutions. The recognition of China helped to ease its admission to the United Nations shortly thereafter. The prime minister was also determined to review Canada's commitments to NATO, an alliance forged at the beginning of the Cold War that he regarded as Eurocentric and less central to the new Canada that was beginning to emerge. Here, the ambition was far grander than the result. After extensive consultations in Ottawa, Canada withdrew about half of its forces from their NATO bases in Europe, and even that partial withdrawal provoked real consternation in Europe and the United States. The cost and pain seemed hardly worth the gain.

The seemingly quixotic "peace initiative" of Trudeau's last year in office is another thread within this loosely woven tapestry. Cold War tensions escalated dramatically after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, and President Reagan responded with dramatic increases in military spending. Trudeau began to worry deeply, not for the first time, about an accidental nuclear catastrophe. Initially sceptical that he could make any difference whatsoever, Trudeau decided to make a round-the-world trip in the fall of 1983 to promote specific proposals on arms control. Never optimistic that the proposals would gain acceptance, he nevertheless wanted to try to cool the rising temperature and change the tone. None of the proposals were accepted and Trudeau had great difficulty in getting a serious hearing. Sceptics chortled, at home as well as abroad. Yet, the time line of history tells a somewhat different story. Less than two years later, a new general secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev, would come to power in Moscow and put very similar kinds of proposals on the agenda. At the worst, Trudeau was ahead of his times, but not by much.

An assessment of the impact of Trudeau's policies on the structures of the Cold War would not give great weight to the substantive consequences of Canada's actions. Indeed, it was under Trudeau that Ottawa agreed to permit the testing of the Cruise missile over Canadian territory, an agreement that was, "in *flagrante contradictio*" to the prime minister's commitment to arms control. But such an assessment would partly miss the point. Canada was, as the prime minister put it, "the largest of the small powers rather than the smallest of the large powers." It could not by itself change the course of world politics, but it could change the tone, help to reshape the language, and create small openings. "The role of the superpowers cannot be denied," he told the House of Commons in 1981, "but it must not be exclusive." A decade before the Cold War ended, Trudeau was trying to shake up the ossified structures of the Cold War.

Closely linked was Trudeau's determination to do a much better job in helping the "third world," the countries of the South. Here, issues of peace, justice, and equity converged; the path to peace, the prime minister insisted, was through development. Trudeau created the two specialized agencies, CIDA and the IDRC, that are still responsible for development assistance in Canada today and increased Canada's budget for development from .34 percent to .49 percent of GNP. In the Trudeau years, Canada became the fifth largest aid donor among OECD countries. Again, the record seems fairly modest and, indeed, more, much more, could have been done. Aid tied to the purchase of Canadian products continued to dominate, as it still does today, and, more important, Canada protected its markets from the exports of third world countries. Yet, the prime minister pushed this part of the world onto Canada's radar screen. Traditionally preoccupied with the "mother countries" of Britain and France and later by the United States, Canada emerged from its colonial past under Trudeau to focus some of its energies on others who shared that past. Under Trudeau, we would argue, Canada finally charted a post colonial policy.

Trudeau worked not only to lessen Cold War constraints but to reshape Canada through the face it presented to the world. He had come to office determined to develop Canada as a bilingual country where francophones could feel at home with their government anywhere in the country. Indeed, when he announced the foreign policy review in May 1968, he made clear its central purpose: "Our paramount interest is to ensure the political survival of Canada as a federal and bilingual sovereign state." The first priority was to neutralize the support of de Gaulle's France for the *indépendantiste* movement in Quebec and the push by the government of Quebec for representation abroad. Foreign policy became one of the arenas in which domestic political battles were fought. Trudeau also moved vigorously to increase development assistance to French-speaking Africa. Attention to the French-speaking world now rivaled the historic pattern of attention to the Commonwealth. Both mirrored Canada's past but provided new opportunities for Canada to express its diversity as it channeled assistance to the south. Foreign and domestic policy were inseparable.

The least successful dimension of Trudeau's foreign policy was the all-important relationship with the United States. The book-ends of his tenure as prime minister were Presidents Nixon and Reagan, and Trudeau had little empathy with either. He always distinguished sharply between the United States, as a democracy which was respectful of the rights of its citizens, and the Soviet Union, which denied these fundamental rights, but Trudeau was fundamentally uneasy with the Manichean tendencies of Washington.

Trudeau moved forcefully to assert Canada's responsibility as a custodian of the fragile environment of the North when Exxon announced, with the support of Washington, that it would send the tanker *Manhattan* through the Northwest Passage. Designed initially as a counterweight to the United States, Canada under Trudeau took the early steps in the long process of developing its "northern face" in foreign as well as domestic policy.

Trudeau accomplished far less in his efforts to reduce Canada's economic and cultural vulnerability to its dynamic and powerful neghbour to the south. In 1972, Canada announced a "third option" designed to reduce Canada's exposure to the United States: the strengthening of Canadian ownership of the economy, the diversification of trade abroad, and the protection of Canadian culture. In retrospect, the Trudeau era can be seen as a brief period of intense economic and cultural nationalism. It is no small irony, that Trudeau, the visceral opponent of nationalism in Quebec, the committed liberal, the promoter and defender of individual rights, came to embody Canadian nationalism in economic and cultural policy. Three decades later, there are no traces left of economic nationalism and few traces of cultural protection. Virtually all the restrictions on foreign ownership have disappeared and although trade expanded, the concentration of exports to the United States increased. As world trade and foreign investment exploded globally, Canada, under his successor, Brian Mulroney, embraced free trade and began a process of continental economic integration. Trudeau's policies of counterweight clearly failed.

Several decades later, however, the issues Trudeau raised at home and abroad remain very much with Canadians. Indeed, in the wake of September 11 and a newly resurgent and unilateralist United States, Canadians once again find themselves asking many of the same questions that Trudeau raised. Can Canada, at best the largest of the small powers, retain a distinctive voice on global issues, especially on the security issues

The Gazette, Montreal

Pierre Trudeau, in the leather coat he made famous, taking off on his leadership tour of the provinces during the winter that led to the spring of Trudeaumania in 1968.

that are centrally important to Washington? And, can Canadians preserve their rights in the face of new kinds of threats? Can Canada afford to see the world differently than its embattled but overwhelmingly powerful neighbour? Can Canada retain its distinct linguistic, cultural and political traditions in the face of the overwhelming pull to continental economic integration? Can Canada preserve its social policies as governments worldwide deregulate?

By the time Trudeau left office in 1984, the dazzle had disappeared and the magic seemed to have gone. But he had changed the face of Canada, its culture, and its political practice. In the Trudeau era, we Canadians briefly saw ourselves as sassy, irreverent and iconoclastic in a world that was fairly rigid, predictable, and straight-laced. And as we saw ourselves through our prime minister, others began to see us. A country that could repeatedly re-elect a prime minister like Pierre Elliott Trudeau must be more than nice, conventional, and polite. When Trudeau died after more than two decades in private life, in an outpouring of emotion, we reconnected to the man who had not only changed the country, but who had transformed the way we thought about ourselves and our potential. Trudeau's most unusual gift may well have been to penetrate our typical reserve and energize, provoke, infuriate, and above all, touch the hearts of fellow Canadians.

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