

Pierre Trudeau

Pierre Trudeau, former Prime Minister of Canada, was once described as "A French Canadian proud of his identity and culture, yet a biting critic of French-Canadian society, determined to destroy its mythology and illusions". He has also been identified as "A staunch, upholder of provincial autonomy holding the justice portfolio in the federal government". Such cumulative appraisal and observation made by past fellow bureaucrat provides high testimonial for the ex-Democratic Socialist. This critique will establish and dispute the prime directives that Trudeau had advocated in his own book written during the years 1965 to 1967. The compilation of political essays featured in his book deal with the diverse complexities of social, cultural and economical issues that were predominant in Canadian politics during the mid 1960's. However, throughout my readings I was also able to discover the fundamental principles that Trudeau would advocate in order to establish a strong and productive influence in Canadian politics.

Born in 1921, Trudeau entered the world in a bilingual/bicultural home located in the heart of Montreal, Quebec. His acceptance into the University of Montreal would mark the beginning of his adventures into the Canadian political spectrum. Early in his life, Trudeau had become somewhat anti-clerical and possessed communist ideologies which were considered radical at the time. Graduating from prestigious institutions such as Harvard and The School of Economics in England, Trudeau returned to Canada in 1949 and resumed his social science endeavors. At this time in Quebec, the province was experiencing tremendous cultural and political differences with the rest of the country. The Union Nationale had taken possession of political matters in Quebec and was steadily dismantling the socialist essence imposed on the province by the Federal government. The current Prime Minister, Maurice Duplessis, found himself battling a religious nationalist movement that corrupted the very fabric of political stability in Quebec. The Duplessis faction maintained their conservative approach towards political reform but failed to sway the majority of the population into alleviating with the demands of the Canadian government. The citizens of Quebec revered their clerical sector as holding 'utmost importance' towards preserving French cultural values and this did not correlate with the Federal government's policies and ideals. Francophones were under the impression that their own Federal government had set out to crush and assimilate what had remained of their illustrious heritage in order to accommodate economic and political tranquility. Trudeau himself had decided to join the nationalist uprising with his advocacy of provincial autonomy. Ultimately, he and other skilled social scientists attempted to bring down the Duplessis party in 1949, but failed miserably in their efforts. Duplessis buckled underneath the continuous pressure of French patriotism and was rewarded for his inept idleness by winning his fourth consecutive election in 1956. Although nothing of significance had been accomplished, Quebec has solidified its temporary presence in confederation at such a time. This prompted Trudeau to involve himself in provincial diplomacy as he would engage in several media projects that would voice his displeasure

and disapproval with the ongoing cultural predicament in Canada (this included a syndicated newspaper firm, live radio programs). "If, in the last analysis, we continually identify Catholicism with conservatism and patriotism with immobility, we will lose by default that which is in play between all cultures...". By literally encouraging a liberal, left-wing revolution in his province, Trudeau believed that Democracy must come before Ideology. Gradually, his disposition would attract many politicians and advocates of Socialism, and thus it allowed him to radiate his ideology onto the populace of Quebec. Trudeau makes it clear in his book that during the early years of the Duplessis government, he was a staunch admirer of provincial autonomy, but with the archaic sequence of events following the conflicts that arouse between Federal and Provincial matters in Quebec, he had taken a stance on Federalism that involved security, economic prosperity and centralized authority. It wasn't until 1963 when the newly appointed Premier of Quebec, Rene Levesque, warned that there must be a new Canada within five years or Quebec will quit confederation. It was not until 1965 that a man named Pierre Trudeau entered politics.

It is at this point in his anthology that I was able to surmise the radical and unorthodox political convictions that the soon-to-be Prime Minister would incorporate into Canada. His thesis is focused around pertinent issues which demanded attention at the time. After he elaborates on the importance of Federalism and how it is associated with Quebec, the reader begins to interpret the resolutions he offers and then finds himself comprehending the dilemma that French Canadians face in Canada. In the wake of a constitutional referendum, such knowledge can be viewed as ironically significant. A defender of civil rights and freedoms, Trudeau, even as a teenager, was adamantly opposed to supporting any political theory based on ethnic tendencies; he makes this clear on an essay in the book entitled: "Quebec and the Constitutional Problem". He was convinced that not only the divided jurisdiction of a federal state helped protect the liberty of its citizens but also that in fact the economic, social and cultural goods of Quebec can best be achieved with a Canadian federal state. It seemed that an archetypal Trudeau Federal infrastructure would be one where each level of government would function on its own jurisdiction. In doing so, Trudeau would voice his admiration for the Bill of Rights and how he would concentrate on developing a Federal government for the individual. It was not until 1962 that Trudeau actually began defending Federalism for what it represented to the average labourer, but the fact that Quebec seemed to convert provincial autonomy into an absolute forced him to reconsider his political stance. Joining the struggling Liberal party in 1965, his only coinciding proposition with that of his party was the advocacy of an open Federal system. Nonetheless, it marked the beginning of a political career that would take him to the heights of power in his dominion.

"My political action, or my theory - insomuch as I can be said to have one - can be expressed very simply: create counter-weights". The measure of a man can be traced to his ideological convictions, and in doing so, I have only started to realize the prominent role that Trudeau has played in Canadian politics. He was heralded as a radical, somewhat of a usurper and definitely a

socialist mogul, but what was clear about Trudeau was his respect and admiration for liberties of the common man and how they were preserved from the clutches of Federal policies. This respect would not be replaced at any cost during his tenure and as he forecasted the ensuing constitutional dilemma with a very impartial, non-partisan outlook, he would primarily concentrate on two factors (economic and linguistic) which offered practical conclusions without chaotic implications. Trudeau envisioned himself in power, speculating two choices he would offer to Quebec; full sovereignty or maximized integration into the American continent. But what Trudeau avoided treading upon was the infringement of state policies on the individual's rights and freedoms. Many members of the Federal government believed that Trudeau did not speak on behalf of French Canadians but that he substituted their cultural plight with his own theories. This generated the following response: "If the party does not agree with my opponents, it can repudiate me; if my constituents do not, they can elect someone else". Trudeau maintains that he dedicated his anthology in order for others to understand the problems that French Canadians faced in terms of cultural progress, and I am compelled to conclude that his involvement with the Federal regime may have saved the country for twenty years...unfortunately, he was unable to complete the affirmation of his ideology into the French Canadian scope and thus Canada today is contemplating the outcome of another constitutional referendum. His failure to absolve the constitution of any future repercussions with the masses should not be viewed as a political error, but as an ideological truth which he exhibited since 1965 (the addition of the "notwithstanding" clause).

Trudeau's book covers an immense amount of historical and idealistic content. Published in 1965, it is fascinating to read and discover how intently and closely he would follow his ideologies as he would eventually ascend to the position of Prime Minister. His reliability would be questionable at the time (based on limited experience as a politician) but the fact that he had submerged himself into a field which required innovative and pragmatic thought led me to believe that his Federalist stance would eventually be justified in Canadian history. With a superlative writing style, his use of vocabulary and terminology aided the reader in understanding his convictions. Not even this reader expected such a barrage of political jargon.

Recent events in Canada have somewhat curtailed the ambience dealing with this critique in respects to the opinions exhibited on behalf of the author and reviewer. Trudeau takes obvious pride in his ideological perspective of multicultural Canada, and in doing so one might expect a partisan, biased array of resolutions. This, however, is not the case. This book leaves room for educational prowess without any noticeable weaknesses. Federalism and the French Canadians is an insightful, ideological anthology that could be found especially useful to other politics students who wish to examine the importance of cultural and social values in a country missing a stable political doctrine (and perhaps a leader, no less).