

Images of Pierre Trudeau: Introduction to the Special Issue

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This collection brings together six papers originally presented at a conference on 'Images of Trudeau' at Southampton Institute in November 2001. The conference was held under the auspices of the London Conference for Canadian Studies, with financial support from the Canadian High Commission and the Québec Government Office in London which the LCCS gratefully acknowledges. The purpose of the conference was to commemorate the life and death (on 28 September 2000) of Pierre Elliott Trudeau; and in particular to bring to the attention of a UK audience a number of reflections and perspectives on the personal and political style of Canada's most intellectual and flamboyant prime minister.

It is important to clarify that the conference was intended as a forum for the exchange and dissemination of views on the part of both Canadian and UK-based students of Trudeau, and not as gathering of experts intent on identifying a future research agenda for an authoritative study of Trudeau's legacy. Accordingly, 'Images of Trudeau' was selected as the organizing framework best calculated to achieve the two modest, but valuable, goals of mutual dialogue between specialists from different disciplinary backgrounds and 'consciousness raising' about Trudeau on the part of predominantly British conference participants. As the guest editor of this special issue, as well as someone who had a hand in organizing the Southampton conference, I have tried to be faithful to the original conference objectives without compromising accepted notions of scholarship and academic rigour.

The contributions to this special issue include two interpretive essays, one of which is a practitioner or 'semi-insider account' of Trudeau's foreign policy by a working diplomat, and four more fully developed pieces of scholarship based primarily around the discipline of political science, but drawing also from the fields of media and cultural studies. In selecting the contributions, the operative criterion was that each had something relevant and interesting to say about substantive policy areas and/or Trudeau's image and political style. But no attempt has been made to be exhaustive or systematic in the treatment of either theme, and clearly, in this sense there are major gaps in this special issue.

Thus, it is a matter of regret that there is nothing in the special issue relating, for example, to Western Canada or to Trudeau's economic policies.

Nonetheless, between them, the contributions illuminate most of the dimensions of Trudeau's political image and statecraft for which he is remembered by obituarists. Annis May Timpson, for example, in her obituary of Pierre Trudeau in *The Guardian* (30 September 2000), identifies as the "hallmarks of his 17 years in government", Trudeau's "disdain for Quebec nationalism, belief in a bilingual, multi-cultural federation and commitment to the constitutional entrenchment of civic rights and freedoms" (p.22)—three themes echoed in this collection by Christian Dufour's essay on "Trudeau's legacy: a new Canadian nationalism based on the denial of the *Québécois* heart of Canada"; by David Hutchison in his "Canadian cultural policy, Maclean's magazine and the coverage of the death of Pierre Trudeau", which uses the coverage of the death and funeral of Pierre Trudeau in Canada's Anglophone magazine to highlight continuing insecurities about pan-Canadian identity; and, in relation to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Trudeau's record on gender and Arctic politics, by Annis May Timpson herself ("Trudeau, women and the mystic North").

"By all accounts", Timpson notes in her *Guardian* obituary, "Trudeau was a competitive young man...Physically and intellectually agile, he had a need to win or have the final word" (p.22.). This is a theme taken up by Paul Nesbitt-Larking, who uses psychoanalysis and discourse theory to explore Trudeau's political personality in "The discourse of aggression: Trudeau in Parliament". Another aspect of the Trudeau phenomenon noted in the *Guardian* obituary is "Trudeaumania", which "took root in February 1968, when he (Trudeau) announced his candidacy for the Liberal leadership" (ibid.). "Trudeaumania" may be seen as an exemplary exercise in political marketing and serves as a convenient bridge to Wayne Hunt's analysis in "The branding of Trudeau" of the use of communications technology to build the Trudeau political "brand".

Another defining characteristic of Trudeau's political style is that he was an intellectual. Trained as a lawyer, he was a member of the Quebec intelligentsia who had travelled widely and studied at Harvard, the Sorbonne and the LSE before entering politics. In the 1950s, he co-founded *Cité Libre*, a journal that became the intellectual mainspring of the revolt against the Union Nationale regime of Maurice Duplessis. In his own contributions to *Cité Libre*, Trudeau called for "reason over nationalist passion" and elaborated a vision of a federal Canada based on principles of liberal individualism that would earn him the lasting enmity of Quebec separatists. As is the case with Hunt, the final contri-

bution to this special issue, by Jeremy Kinsman, takes up the theme of “reason over passion” by focusing on the intellectual strategy underpinning Trudeau’s foreign policy.

I would like to end this introduction by emphasizing the extent to which an engagement with Trudeau and his statecraft can shed more general light on the dilemmas of governance in contemporary liberal democracies, not least in Britain. Trudeau sought to give effect to a vision of a pan-Canadian nationalism rooted in the notion that the individual must be recognized prior to distinct communities and nations. In practice, Trudeau’s politics of recognition has clashed with another, more communitarian, form of politics of recognition—one in which the identity of individual Canadians is grounded in difference and fought for on the basis of group, as opposed to individual, rights. With the benefit of hindsight, Trudeau’s statecraft, understood as the practical remedies he proposed and championed for governing a multi-cultural Canada, may have been found wanting. In particular, it is often argued that Trudeau’s strategy of using the Charter of Rights to implant a strong sense of Canadian citizenship has been undermined by the determined use of the Charter to pursue group rights on the part of those with real or imagined grievances¹. But Sniderman and his colleagues are surely right to point out that the clash of rights is not peculiar to Canada—rather,

(Canada’s) very lack of a clear national identity or dominant political ideology, though problematic for the country’s feature as a unified political community, gives it a comparative advantage as an arena in which to study the interplay of values and perspectives in the politics of rights and freedoms².

These remarks, it is submitted, have a particular resonance for those of us who are citizens of a centralized, executive-dominated British polity whose governing elite has finally embraced a “rights”-based constitutionalism and the devolution of legislative powers to a Scottish Assembly.

The task of editing this special issue has been a pleasant and rewarding one. I wish to thank all the contributors for their diligence, co-operation and good humour in responding to my requests that they work up their initial conference presentations into papers suitable for inclusion in this special issue of the *London Journal of Canadian Studies*. I owe a special debt of gratitude to my erstwhile colleague Terry McDonald, who was the inspiration and driving force behind the Southampton conference.

Endnotes

- ¹ See, for example, Richard Nielson, “Trudeau, Québec and imagined grievances”, *Policy Options*, 22, 1 (2001), 88–90.
- ² P. Sniderman, J. Fletcher, P. Russell and P. Tetlock, *The Clash of Rights: Liberty, Equality and Legitimacy in Pluralist Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), quoted in S. LaSelva, “Three encounters with Trudeau’s Canada”, *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, 14, 1996, 259.