

On Justin Trudeau's 50th birthday, the shadow of his father looms large



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will be observing his 50th birthday on Christmas Day and it is normal courtesy to extend good wishes and reflect on the past on such a noteworthy anniversary. While he is unlikely to be as important a figure in Canada's history as his father was, he achieved the country's highest office at age 43, five years younger than his father was when he first came to power in 1968. Pierre Trudeau automatically became prime minister on winning the federal Liberal leadership, while Justin is the only prime minister in Canadian history to lead his party from the third party in Parliament to government in one election; and he managed to form what is only the second majority government Canada has had in the seven elections since the Progressive Conservatives and Reform parties were reunited in 2004.

When Pierre Trudeau became prime minister, he confirmed his

intention to consolidate benefits for Indigenous people into the welfare system and to resume the traditional policy of promoting the integration of all Canadians into a nationality in which everyone would ultimately be within the English- or French-speaking cultures. In the early days of his government, those joining the Indian Affairs ministry understood that the department was likely to be discontinued and their jobs lost. From this point, the Indigenous independentists gradually gained ground to the point where public office-holders are now forced to apologize and are liable to lose their positions for making the point that the residential schools were sometimes beneficial to the Native population, and people are banned from media outlets (as I was from a Toronto radio station a couple of years ago), for denying that Canada is a place of "systemic racism." Of course, it is nothing of the kind, and Pierre Trudeau, chief author of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, would be appalled by this curtailment of freedom of expression.

The generally well-intentioned but largely unsuccessful attempt to assist Indigenous people to make their way in Canadian society has latterly been defamed as a "cultural genocide." The replacement policy of atomizing Indigenous people (along with others) and arming them as an aggrieved minority has practically no chance of success. I do not question the sincerity of either Trudeau in the opposite policies that they have favoured, but they both have failed.

The policy currently in vogue, "reconciliation," is based on false assumptions about past government conduct, inflamed by people who should know better, such as former Supreme Court chief justice Beverley McLachlin. It will be impossible to maintain the support of a majority of patriotic Canadians while falsely comparing John A. Macdonald to Adolf Hitler and smearing all of us and our ancestors with a blood libel that is, to say the least, wildly unjust. On matters pertaining to First Nations, we have to start again with a clean slate, work

the issues out with the many outstanding leaders of the Indigenous community, and get it right. Nothing positive is achieved by indiscriminately throwing billions of dollars at Indigenous issues with inadequate assurances of the effective application of those funds, while endlessly excoriating generations of Canadians of European ancestry as racists.

A similar pattern can be seen in the evolution of gender matters. Pierre Trudeau, when he became minister of justice in 1967, reformed the Criminal Code to make previously illegal sexual practices unexceptionable if performed among consenting adults and with appropriate discretion. Pierre Trudeau famously said: "There is no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation."

None could foresee that half a century later under his son, we would have fully qualified professors in leading universities threatened with disemployment if they did not accede to a special vocabulary in addressing people of certain sexual orientations. This prime minister has lavished an absurd amount of attention on matters that are better left where his father consigned them: to the bedroom.

This will astound historians as much as this government's war on the petroleum industry and its determination to retard the country's standard of living and reject vital foreign capital in order to reduce the production of carbon dioxide.

Authentic outdoorsman and anti-growth economy naif though he was, I doubt if Pierre Trudeau would have bought into the climate-change bunk with the robotic militancy that his son has. Pierre Trudeau almost taxed the petroleum industry of Canada into oblivion, thinking it an Aladdin's lamp that would always produce fiscal miracles; where Justin, brainwashed by the economic morticians of the climate-change meme – the product of a dodgy fusion of old Marxists and evangelically zealous conservationists – wants to shut down our greatest industry and confer the benefits of it upon undeserving and

inimical oil-exporting countries. On this one, both Trudeaus strike out.

An even greater contrast between the prime ministers Trudeau is in what 50 years ago was known as the national unity issue. Pierre Trudeau patriated and amended Canada's Constitution and festooned it with a Charter of Rights, which particularly aimed at the promotion of the language rights of both founding cultures. He did not lift a finger over Quebec premiers Robert Bourassa and René Lévesque's restrictive language legislation, bills 22 (1974) and 101 (1977), with the usual Liberal assumption of blind adherence from English Quebec no matter how outrageously it is tormented by the provincial government. But he did speak out against them, and upheld the official equality of English and French throughout the country. He famously said to the angry Albertan who reproached him because of French wording on his cereal box: "Why don't you turn the box around?"

Justin Trudeau has tacitly approved Quebec's Bill 96, which would unilaterally alter the Canadian Constitution (to which Quebec is not even a signatory) and extend the French language charter to the federal government and federally chartered corporations in Quebec. The other provinces have abandoned almost all interest in Quebec; and although the oppression of the English language will fail in Quebec, a country that's indifferent to having its majority language practically officially cancelled in its second-most-populous province will not ultimately command the respect of anyone. Canada's indifference to the issue is disappointing and dangerous. Pierre Trudeau would have done better than all the current federal party leaders.

There is some truth in Justin Trudeau's much-mocked "sunny ways" (quoting Wilfrid Laurier). His father, as I knew him, was very intelligent and entertaining and congenial, a delight to have dinner with (though he never picked up the cheque, even when it was his invitation), but not, I would say, very

companionable. Justin Trudeau's optimism and cordiality are sincere and naturally ingenuous. In that spirit, I congratulate him on his remarkably successful first half-century and wish him a happy birthday; and a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all.

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