

Articles: A Canadian Political Icon

READING TEXT

The Weekly News Editorial

by Roberto Keskin

I was introduced to Canadian politics at the age of three. Pierre Elliott Trudeau was on the campaign trail, trying to collect enough votes for his party so that he could be the Prime Minister of Canada. He was making quick stops at cities and towns across Canada. My father took my siblings and me to one of these political gatherings. We joined about two hundred other people in an open field near our new subdivision. As the youngest child in our family, I was perched on my father's shoulders, high above the heads of the people in the crowd. From my place of honour, I reported on what was happening to my less fortunate siblings. There was a great noise and wind as a military helicopter descended from the sky. As soon as the helicopter touched down, a man stepped out. His hair was being whipped around by the wind from the helicopter. He had a huge smile on his face. He waved at us all. He spoke briefly. Then he waved again and got back in the helicopter. And he was gone. Young though I was, I relished every detail of this event.

Trudeau's party won the election and he became the fifteenth Prime Minister of Canada. One of Canada's longest serving Prime Ministers, Trudeau held the position for a total of fifteen years, from 1968 to 1979 and again from 1980 to 1984. Few politicians in Canada have generated as much discussion and debate as Pierre Trudeau. Canadians either loved him or hated him. Upon his death in September 2000, at the age of 81, Trudeau's eccentricities, charisma, and exploits (both political and personal) were once again the topic of conversation and debate. People remembered the red rose he frequently wore in his jacket lapel. They recalled the famous women he dated, like Barbra Streisand, Kim Cattrall and Margot Kidder. And they recalled the pirouette he once did behind the back of Queen Elizabeth II. However, there was more to Trudeau than his unorthodox behaviour. He profoundly influenced, for good or for ill, the course of Canadian political, social and economic development.

Trudeau believed very deeply in a strong federal government. He felt that a strong federal government would allow Canadians right across the country to enjoy the same standard of living. This belief gave him the strength to navigate a number of serious political crises. In 1970, the FLQ, an extreme separatist group in Quebec, kidnapped and murdered a Quebec politician in support of their cause. Trudeau did not back down. Asked how far he would go to stop the FLQ, he responded, “Just watch me!” In a move still hotly debated today, he invoked the War Measures Act and imposed temporary martial law on Canada. Trudeau used the same iron will and determination to survive a very close referendum on Quebec independence in 1980.

Along with his belief in a strong federal government, Trudeau had an equally strong belief in bilingualism. He had a dream of a Canada in which a French or an English speaker could feel at home anywhere. Regardless of which of the two official languages a Canadian spoke, he wanted them to have access to services and opportunities in their own language.

Trudeau is also remembered for bringing the Canadian Constitution back to Canada. Canada had become a country with the enactment of the British North America by the British parliament in 1867. The parliamentary document had remained in Britain through all the years of Canadian independence. Trudeau felt that it was important that this document be in Canada. He repatriated the document in 1982. At the same time, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to advance civil rights and liberties, was incorporated into the constitution.

Where is the controversy in Trudeau’s career? Many western Canadians felt that his federalist stance was really just a way to favour Ontario and Quebec at the expense of western provinces. Some Quebecers felt his federalist stance betrayed the cause of French Canadians. The business community considered his economic policies to be weak and detrimental to Canada’s economy. Many Canadians, regardless of where they lived, blamed his social policies for Canada’s crippling national debt. Some people felt he pushed bilingualism too far. Others felt he did not push it far enough. Still others debate the usefulness of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

However, there are some things about Trudeau can not be debated. No one can deny the energy and confidence with which he approached his role as Prime Minister of Canada. No one can accuse him of NOT having any beliefs. Above all, Trudeau will be remembered for the passion with which he pursued his vision of Canada. This passion was evident, even to a three-year old perched on his father’s shoulders, watching his first political rally.

Find examples of special cases for the use of ARTICLES.

Write a sentence with each of the following words and expressions.

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| 1. | CAMPAIGN TRAIL | _____ |
| 2. | SUBDIVISION | _____ |
| 3. | TO PERCH | _____ |
| 4. | TO RELISH | _____ |
| 5. | TO GENERATE
DEBATE | _____ |
| 6. | ECCENTRICITIES | _____ |
| 7. | CHARISMA | _____ |
| 8. | EXPLOITS | _____ |
| 9. | PIROUETTE | _____ |
| 10. | UNORTHODOX | _____ |
| 11. | PROFOUNDLY | _____ |
| 12. | TO NAVIGATE | _____ |
| 13. | TO BACK DOWN | _____ |
| 14. | IRON WILL | _____ |
| 15. | REFERENDUM | _____ |
| 16. | TO REPATRIATE | _____ |
| 17. | CONTROVERSY | _____ |
| 18. | FEDERALIST | _____ |
| 19. | DETRIMENTAL | _____ |
| 20. | CRIPPLING | _____ |

Answer the following questions.

1. Describe the author's introduction to politics.

2. What is your impression of Pierre Trudeau from the information in paragraph two?

3. What did Trudeau believe in?

4. What were some of the historical events that occurred during Trudeau's political career?

5. Why is there controversy surrounding Trudeau's political career?
