

Trudeaumania revisited

PETER BRIMELOW

AS THE TIME APPROACHED for Justice Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau to be anointed leader of Canada's governing Liberal party in 1968, hysteria overcame the incestuous Canadian media elite. George Radwanski culls the following ludicrous sample:

His intelligent, skull-formed face (which might have been carved in alabaster to commemorate some distant war of the crusades) is a pattern of tension, subtlety, unrest and audacity. He is a man who both in his physical presence and intellectual discourse manages to maintain a detached view of his environment, yet at the same time give the impression of being responsive to the play of political forces around him . . . Trudeau is an agent of ferment, a critic of Canadian society, questioning its collected conventional wisdom. He mistrusts rhetoric, has only disdain for pomposity, and longs for contemporary fulfillment through experience.

The fact is that Canadian journalists have a much greater tendency than their U.S. counterparts to abase themselves before cliques within the governing party. This is partly due to a sort of cabin fever induced by Ottawa's arctic wastes, and partly because the Liberals, in power for all but seven of the last 58 years, have effectively established, on the federal level, a one-party state.

Truckling pays. Trudeau's government destroyed *Time* magazine's Canadian edition by refusing to treat advertising in it as a business expense before taxes; his erstwhile flatterer quoted above, Peter C. Newman, is now editor of the local substitute, *Maclean's*, which, to complete the circle, celebrated its first issue as a weekly by suppressing a cover critical of Tru-

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deau. But equally, such sycophancy guarantees that "collected conventional wisdom" will remain distinctly unquestioned, let alone fermented.

Radwanski himself is not totally free of the adulation or the truckling. Although he is a working journalist, his relationship with Trudeau has remained sufficiently cordial for him to be favored with eight hour-long interviews; transcripts of these provide the heart of this book, which just shows what a disaster tape recorders have been for journalism. Trudeau has mastered the politician's art of rattling on with his mind out of gear, and Radwanski was apparently too awestruck to ask incisive questions—which is hardly surprising, given that he agrees uncritically with all the *dirigiste* noises Trudeau makes on such occasions. The author merely regrets that, as prime minister, Trudeau hasn't done more about them.

Whatever the cause, Radwanski's inhibitions mean that this cannot be regarded as a definitive or even substantial analysis of the Canadian who presides over the alternative democratic North American society and its potentially explosive English-French tensions. Radwanski is even discreet about Trudeau's age (he was born in

1919, but lopped off two years on entering politics) and about how he was referred to in the *Front de la Libération du Québec* manifesto that was read over French-language tv in an attempt to obtain the release of the hostages in the crisis of October 1970. (*La tapette*, untranslated by most of the English-language media, is a vulgar term for homosexual.) This subject makes Radwanski nervous. He studiously avoids the much-discussed private life of Trudeau and his entourage, barely mentioning even those aspects, like his stormy marriage, that have become public. And he fails to address the repeated reports of files kept by counterintelligence authorities on key Trudeau associates.

What is addressed instead, however, is Radwanski's claim that Trudeau's election was "in a limited sense, an experiment with the Platonic concept of a philosopher-king, a leader chosen exclusively for the quality of his thought." This, along with the claim that "Trudeau has an intellect unrivalled among Canadian politicians and quite possibly among his foreign counterparts as well," is crucial to his image at home and abroad.

The claims are based on no evidence at all. Trudeau has followed his nor-

mal practice of intimidating interviewers by bombarding Radwanski with impressive-sounding authors, most apparently unread. Thus Radwanski tells us in wonderment that Trudeau's philosophy "consists primarily of an overlay of Acton, de Tocqueville, Montesquieu and a host of other thinkers on a foundation of the classical liberalism of John Stuart Mill and John Locke," a claim belied by Trudeau's illiberal record in office. Trudeau also informed Radwanski that he is in favor of individual freedom, but did not volunteer (and was not asked) how this could be reconciled with concrete realities like the 1970 roundup of Québec separatists and the spread of economic regulation during his tenure in office. In fact, Trudeau made it clear that he considers the main threat to freedom as coming from "financial interests, monopolies and cartels." He has, of course, a candidate to help keep them in line.

Trudeau is very fond of talking about "participation" in government. Unfortunately, it often turns out that those participating want things, such as capital punishment, that Trudeau opposes. Accordingly, he has evolved a distinction between "participation" (you) and "decision-making" (him).

But it should be noted that Trudeau in a sense really does believe in participation. He spent some time perplexing the simple pols in the Liberal machine by attempting to use it to mobilize and consensus-build among the great Canadian public, which of course had other plans for its weekends. His attempt at a perpetual heart-to-heart with Canada was naive, impractical, and ultimately banal, which seems to be true of Trudeau-think in general. Like his much-vaunted administrative reforms with their endlessly proliferating committees, it bears the fatal mark of academia—and of the intellectual dilettante.

This curious combination of socialism, patrician hedonism, and pedantry became prime minister 30 months after entering politics, because of the peculiar needs of the institution he had spent his adult life denouncing from the left, the Liberal party of Canada. Basically similar to the Democrats, the Liberals have historically been an alliance of some big businessmen, bureaucrats, ethnic groups, and various progressive elements. Now increasingly it is the party of the regulatory minded "New Class." The core of the perennial Liberal majority, however, is the

French vote in Québec, kept in place by massive patronage and frequent waving of the bloody shirt of the opposition Tories' waspishness and alleged bigotry. The Liberals habitually recruit from the left, and alternate their leadership between French- and English-speakers. As the son of a mixed marriage, perfectly bilingual, Trudeau seemed like the ultimate Canadian. He also fiercely opposed Québec separatism and had a left-wing background. (In fact, Trudeau tends to dislike nationalism per se, apparently out of some residual principles. He has acquiesced in, rather than led, contemporary anti-American "economic nationalism.") To an entire political establishment, Trudeau looked like a renewed lease at the trough.

Trudeau's failure is the failure of the Canadian governing class. Mandatory bilingualism in the public service throughout Canada has been enormously expensive and really missed the point of Québécois nationalism. The province is now ruled by a *séparatiste* party visibly preparing to secede. An ambitious welfare state—top civil servants in Ottawa earn more than their equivalents in Washington—has left an immature economy floundering, unable to pay its way under the concomitant regulation and taxation and an economy increasingly uncompetitive and ever deeper in debt. Finally, *pace* Radwanski, authoritarianism has steadily grown in Canada. In the interests of "efficiency," legal procedures have tilted against the accused even more than is implicit in the British inheritance. The federal police force has been happily spying and using agents provocateurs, arousing little effective protest. Even Trudeau's genuinely liberal decriminalization of homosexuality (part of a package, however, that included a repressive gun control law) has been upstaged by the recent provincial persecution of the *Body Politic*, a Toronto-based gay newspaper.

Heart rather than intellect is Trudeau's appeal. Here is a man who refused to budge when pelted and heckled by Québécois demonstrators on St. Jean Baptiste day in 1968, and who provided a panicked country with the authoritarian leadership it craved during the crisis of October 1970, when the Front de la Libération du Québec kidnapped two government officials. (The sweeping powers of Trudeau's War Measures Act, however, must horrify any civil libertarian and

were probably pointless.) No other Canadian politician would dare to reply as Trudeau did in French when asked what he would tell critics who complained that both his constitutional advisers were English-speaking: "I would tell them *merde*." Few people would have reacted with his grace in the midst of Watergate when transcripts revealed Richard Nixon habitually referred to him as an "asshole." ("I've been called worse things by worse men.") The ultimate criticism of Radwanski's book is that it does not catch the drama of this slight, solitary figure, aloof even from his own cabinet colleagues, living alone with his children like the king in the sacred grove, cowering by force of personality the party that by now would normally have sacrificed him to avert 1979's seemingly inevitable electoral disaster. □

THE ORIGINS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR, by Maurice Baumont. Yale University Press, 327 pp., \$22.00.

THE WAR PATH: Hitler's Germany 1933-1939, by David Irving. Viking, 320 pp., \$15.00.

The last good war

SIMON NEWMAN

EXPLANATIONS OF THE Second World War have been more straightforward than those of the First. Before A.J.P. Taylor's groundbreaking, not to say earthshaking, revisionist classic, *The Origins of the Second World War*, was published in 1961, there existed a broad consensus among victors, vanquished, and historians alike. In the words of Maurice Baumont, one of the foremost French exponents of this view, "The origins of the war of 1939 go back essentially to the insatiable appetites of Adolf Hitler." This was written in 1969, so perhaps Taylor's brilliantly

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