

Pierre Elliott Trudeau

Canada's Fifteenth prime minister

Quick Facts

Term(s) of Office:

- April 20, 1968–June 3, 1979
- March 3, 1980–June 30, 1984

Born

- October 18, 1919, Montréal, Quebec

Died

- September 28, 2000, Montréal, Quebec
- **Grave site:** Saint-Rémi-de-Napierville, Quebec

Education

- Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf, B.A. 1940
- Université de Montréal, LL.L. 1943
- Harvard University, M.A. Political Economy 1945
- École des sciences politiques, Paris 1946–1947
- London School of Economics 1947–1948

Personal Life

- Married 1971, Margaret Sinclair (b. 1948)
- Three sons (one died accidentally in 1998)
- Divorced 1984
- One daughter

Occupations

- Lawyer (called to the Quebec Bar in 1943, to the Ontario Bar in 1967)
- 1949–1951 Advisor to the Privy Council
- 1950 Co-founder and director, *Cité libre*
- 1961–1965 Associate Professor of Law, Université de Montréal
- 1961–1965 Researcher, Institut de recherche en droit public
- Author
- Law consultant

Political Party

- Liberal
- 1968–1984 Party Leader

Constituencies

- 1965–1984 Mount Royal, Quebec

Other Ministries

- 1967–1968 Justice and Attorney General of Canada
- 1968 Acting President of the Privy Council

Political Record

- Official Languages Act 1969
- October Crisis (implementation of War Measures Act) 1970
- Appointed Muriel McQueen Fergusson first woman Speaker of the Senate 1972
- Wage and Price Controls 1975
- Leader of the Opposition 1979–1980
- Significant role in the victory of the "No" forces in the Quebec Referendum on Sovereignty-Association 1980
- Appointed Jeanne Sauvé first woman Speaker of the House of Commons 1980
- Canadian Charter of Rights 1982
- Constitution Act 1982
- Appointed Jeanne Sauvé, Canada's first woman governor general 1984

Biography

I believe a constitution can permit the co-existence of several cultures and ethnic groups with a single state.—Pierre Trudeau, September 30, 1965

Pierre Trudeau held his philosophy of one Canada and a strong federal government before he became prime minister and he maintained it throughout his political career. His response to the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) crisis, his rejection of the Quebec separatist movement, as well as his patriation of the Constitution and promotion of official bilingualism are all manifestations of this belief.

Pierre Elliott Trudeau was born in Montréal in 1919; his father was Québécois, his mother of Scottish descent. He went to a local school, Académie Querbes, and then to the Jesuit college, Jean-de-Brébeuf. In spite of the Depression, Trudeau's father prospered in the 1930s and the family toured Canada and Europe frequently. While studying law at the Université de Montréal, Trudeau was conscripted into the army and joined the Canadian Officers Training Corps under the wartime National Resources Mobilization Act of 1940. Trudeau was opposed to conscription.

After graduating in 1943, he passed his bar exams, and then enrolled in a Master's program at Harvard. In 1946, he went to Paris to study at the École des sciences politiques, and then at the London School of Economics in Britain. By 1948, Trudeau was on a backpacking tour of Eastern Europe, and the Middle and Far East, areas of considerable turbulence in the post-war world. After many adventures, he arrived back in Canada the following year.

Trudeau worked in Ottawa as advisor to the Privy Council Office before returning to Montréal. He began supporting labour unions, especially during the Asbestos Strike, and criticized the repression of the Union Nationale under Premier Duplessis. With other outspoken intellectuals,

Trudeau started the journal *Cité Libre* as a forum for their ideas. In 1961, he began teaching law at the Université de Montréal.

In 1965, the Liberal party was looking for potential candidates in Quebec; Trudeau and two of his colleagues, Jean Marchand and Gérard Pelletier, were invited to run for the party in the federal election that year. They won their seats, and in April 1967, Trudeau became Minister of Justice. Within a year, he had reformed the divorce laws and liberalized the laws on abortion and homosexuality.

When Lester Pearson resigned as prime minister in 1968, Trudeau was invited to run as a candidate. He won the Liberal leadership convention and called an election immediately after. Capitalizing on his extraordinary popular appeal, labelled "Trudeaumania" by the press, he won a majority government. One of the most important bills passed by his government was the Official Languages Act, guaranteeing bilingualism in the civil service.

A serious threat to national security occurred in October 1970, when the terrorist group, Front de libération du Québec (FLQ), abducted James Cross, the British Trade Commissioner to Canada and Pierre Laporte, the Quebec Minister of Labour and Immigration. Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa appealed for help and Prime Minister Trudeau imposed the War Measures Act. The terrorists assassinated Pierre Laporte and the army arrested hundreds of people who were held without charges. The October Crisis, as it was called, came to an end in December when James Cross was released.

In 1972, the Liberals were returned with a minority government, but regained a majority in 1974. This decade experienced a period of high inflation, which Trudeau's government attempted to contain with wage and price controls. These economic difficulties and a sense of alienation in Western Canada led to the defeat of the Liberals in 1979. Deciding not to serve as leader of the Opposition, Trudeau announced his resignation from politics. However the Conservative comeback was short lived when their minority government was defeated seven months later. Trudeau was persuaded to return as party leader and the Liberals won the election the following year.

His last term in office was devoted to national unity in opposition to the separatist goals of the Parti Québécois who governed Quebec. Trudeau campaigned vigorously for the "No" supporters in the Quebec referendum on sovereignty-association in 1980. He also set about patriating the Constitution and drafted a Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The cooperation of the provinces was required to accomplish this; the 18-month federal-provincial negotiations were drawn-out and highly contentious, with dissenting ministers and rulings from the Supreme Court and various provincial courts. Consent was finally achieved in 1982, but without the cooperation of Quebec Premier René Lévesque. In a ceremony on Parliament Hill, the Queen signed Canada's new Constitution Act on April 17, 1982.

Having accomplished his goal of strengthening Canadian federalism, Trudeau turned his attention to international affairs, campaigning for world peace and improving the relationship between the industrialized nations and Third World countries.

After a total of 16 years as prime minister, he resigned from politics in 1984. He returned to practicing law, travelled extensively and published his memoirs. His death on September 28, 2000, just short of his 81st birthday, prompted an outpouring of grief and tributes from across the country.

International Relations

As prime minister, one of Trudeau's first objectives was to recognize the People's Republic of China as a legitimate government. Canada did this in October 1970.

As a protest against white-majority rule in South Africa, Canada declared an arms embargo against that country in 1970 and withdrew from a trade assistance program in 1979 that effectively ended the preferential tariff that South Africa had enjoyed since 1932.

U.S. President Nixon brought in a number of economic measures in 1971, including a surcharge on dutiable imports. This threatened Canadian trade and employment, but Trudeau was able to negotiate some exemptions for Canada.

Trudeau's government wanted to lessen the economic and cultural influence of the United States and in 1972, proclaimed a "Third Option" for Canada, strengthening ties with Europe and Japan and depending less on the U.S.A. and Great Britain. In 1973, Trudeau established the Foreign Investment Review Agency as a result of concerns over foreign investment in Canadian companies. Trudeau ordered a complete review of Canada's foreign policy and defence policy. He wanted to put more emphasis on Canada's own priorities rather than those of NATO, but Canada continued to honour its commitments to NATO. In 1976, Canada and the European Economic Community granted each other most-favoured-nation status, and some similar arrangements were made with Japan, but the "Third Option" proved not to be realistic, because Canadian economic and defence concerns are inevitably very closely linked to the United States.

Although initially sceptical about the Commonwealth, Trudeau became a supporter and it gave him the opportunity to meet with leaders from Third World countries. He also supported the Francophone community internationally in the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

In 1976, Canada was admitted to the G7 or Group of Seven countries originally founded to foster economic coordination. When Trudeau attended the Summit in Puerto Rico, he wanted to expand the focus of the G7 to promote democracy and human rights.

Trudeau updated the Immigration Act of 1952. He set up a task force, which resulted in the “Green Paper”. The Immigration Act of 1976 placed more emphasis on practical training rather than education, allowed families of immigrants to enter the country and expanded refugee sponsorship.

In the early 1980s, Trudeau's top priority was to patriate the Constitution, so that the last step in Canada's legal independence was achieved, the right to amend its Constitution. The Queen signed the proclamation of the new Constitution Act during a ceremony on Parliament Hill, April 17, 1982.

Late in 1983, Trudeau launched a “Peace Initiative.” He travelled to Europe, Asia, and finally Washington, speaking to government leaders and advocating several measures relating to disarmament. He was received politely but his efforts did not have much effect on the foreign policy of the other nations.

Anecdote

A prime minister in disguise

Pierre Trudeau has a reputation as Canada's most flamboyantly dressed prime minister. More than once in his life his unusual taste in clothing has landed him in hot water. While at university during the war, he came across some 19th-century German military uniforms in the attic of a friend. Trudeau and his pal decided it would be a great joke to visit some friends dressed up as Prussian officers. They roared off on motorcycles with the pointed steel helmets on their heads, startling all those they met on the road!

While backpacking in the Middle East in 1948, Trudeau adopted the local costume and grew a beard. So well did he blend in with the inhabitants that he was mistaken for a Jewish spy by Arab soldiers in Jerusalem! Only the intervention of a Roman Catholic priest spared Trudeau from being charged with espionage, a crime punishable by death!

After he became a member of Parliament in 1965, Trudeau often upset his conservatively dressed colleagues in the House of Commons with his casual attire. His long hair, sandals and loosely tied cravat were definitely beyond the usual standards of dress in Parliament, and he was upbraided for them by former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker!

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