

Pierre gives historians the familiar finger

But we can still learn a lot about Trudeau's thinking from his selective reminiscences

MEMOIRS

By Pierre Elliott Trudeau
McClelland and Stewart, Toronto
379 pages; hard cover; \$35.00.

Retired statesmen normally like to give historians a head start by picking through their personal papers and compiling a massive history of their time in office—but Pierre Trudeau has never been one to be bound by norms. Instead of the usual tome, he gives us the leftovers from the television series being made by the dreadful McKenna brothers (of *The Valour and the Horror* fame). It is a last pirouette, a final shrug towards the Canadian public, and a middle-finger salute to historians: they won't get any help from Pierre in unscrambling the enigmas of his life.

Visually, much of *Memoirs* is like the photograph albums you send to far-away relatives, with funny captions written below the pictures. My favourite is a photo of the great man with Brian and Mila Mulroney, next to which he has written: "At St. Francis Xavier University in May 1982, I received an honorary Doctor of Laws and met some fellow Montrealers." The famous Trudeau sarcasm is as wicked as ever.

Intellectually, the book is a long defence of his career, justifying his decisions and actions. The rationalizations are both relentless and ingenious. He ridicules the proposal Bob Stanfield made in the 1974 campaign for wage and price controls, because the inflation came from OPEC hikes

the times: "It would have been a great success if oil had gone to \$60 or more a barrel, as virtually the whole world was predicting at the time." And so on.

The book is neither good history nor good autobiography, but it is a revealing guide to the thinking of the man who governed Canada for 16 years. Perhaps the most instructive thing we learn is how Mr. Trudeau viewed the economy. "Before going to Harvard," he writes, "I had been quite a conventional thinker on economics: busi-



The author and 'some fellow Montrealers':
As wickedly sarcastic and unrepentant as ever.

ness was there to produce the goods and services, and the state was there to provide the proper environment for the production of wealth—but not much more." He should have stayed in Montreal. At Harvard, home of the interventionist liberal John Kenneth Galbraith, and at the London School of Economics, home of the socialist Harold Laski, he learned that "as against the 'invisible hand' of Adam Smith, there has to be a visible hand of politicians whose objective is to have the kind of society that is caring and humane." Enter the "Just Society," the Liberal party's 1968 campaign slogan.

One fascinating revelation is that Mr. Trudeau greatly relished his 20 months of minority government, 1972-74, when he was propped up by the NDP. In that happy period he was not obliged to placate the business-oriented wing of the Liberal party; he could "put forward more advanced 'left-wing' projects" because he knew the NDP would support them. "I was thus able to institute policies that I had been

dreaming about for a long time."

So we got Petro-Canada, the Berger inquiry that blocked the Mackenzie Valley pipeline, big hikes in old age security, the world's most generous unemployment insurance scheme, and chronic deficit spending. This was the crucial period when Canada's public finances, which had been a model of responsibility since the Korean War, slipped into permanent deficit. But the man chiefly responsible is unrepentant. Brian Mulroney added more to the debt in nine years than he did in 16, he argues, conveniently ignoring the fact that most of the Mulroney contribution was not program spending, but compound interest on the debt left by Mr. Trudeau.

Another thing we can learn from this book is what happens when a prime minister decides to ride roughshod over the provinces. That was the Trudeau mood when he returned to power with a large majority in 1980: "We had been in office a fairly long time. We had tried federal-provincial co-operation. We had tried to co-operate with business and labour. We had tried to co-operate with the energy-producing provinces. But for all our co-operation we were finding it hard to get anything done. I decided that enough was enough...So we just set out to get some things done."

The result was, in addition to the National Energy Program, the patriation of the constitution over the opposition of both provincial parties in Quebec. Although Mr. Trudeau still glories in the patriation, it laid the basis for a new wave of separatism because the language rights sections of the charter reduced Quebec's legislative control over language. Westerners who resent the NEP should sympathize with Quebec, which was equally victimized by a sort of "National Language Program" embedded in the charter. This 1982 Trudeau "victory" led directly to Brian Mulroney's Faustian bargain with Quebec separatists in 1984, and indirectly to the constitutional troubles that may yet break the country apart.

The comedian Yvon Deschamps calls Pierre Trudeau "the greatest Quebecer ever: He did everything for us—even de-

'I have always regarded regret as a useless emotion.'

of the price of oil, and "you couldn't freeze the price of oil unless you didn't want to buy it." But he calls his own 1975 wage and price control program "entirely different," because "it was expectations within Canada that were causing inflation." The National Energy Program was also right for



Motivator of modern separatism:
Harvard overwhelmed his common sense.

stroyed Canada!" Like all political jokes, this one is unfair, but funny because it is partly true. Mr. Trudeau's determination to impose his own vision of bilingualism on his native province stirred up bitter resentment there. Exhaustion of Canada's public finance through his Just Society gave another turn of the screw to separatism, by undermining the "profitable federalism" of Robert Bourassa. As Lucien Bouchard emphasizes at every opportunity, there are no longer even crass economic reasons for Quebecers to remain in Canada—at least, not if they can get out and stick the rest of us with the debt.

Pierre Trudeau is charismatic, highly intelligent, fluently bilingual, magnificently educated, and possessed of rare physical and moral courage. He could have been the greatest prime minister in Canadian history. Indeed, he governed with honesty and integrity, and he reached most of the policy goals he set. But are we better off because he was in office?

Sad to say, the answer is "No." We are up to our ears in debt. We are loaded with social programs we cannot pay for. And we are faced with two separatist parties in Quebec, of which one will soon be the official opposition in Ottawa, and the other may well win the next provincial election and call a second referendum on Quebec sovereignty. The reasons for this sorry state of affairs have much to do with the policies that Pierre Elliott Trudeau pursued so energetically.

—Tom Flanagan
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