

Powersharing: Trudeau's just world order

The world that Pierre Trudeau encountered in April 1968 was small and crowded. Suddenly, almost overnight it seemed to many, Canada's international role was much less obvious. Western Europe, Japan, and the People's Republic of China shook off the last remnants of the Second World War and surged onto the global stage, demanding larger voices and bigger roles. New states emerging from the ruins of European empires in Africa and Asia flexed their diplomatic muscle too and insisted on being heard.

Faster communications - cheap phones and low-cost jet travel - combined with the wave of trade liberalization unleashed by GATT in 1967 to herald a new era of globalization. Fierce competition from the "NICs" - the newly industrialised countries of Southeast Asia - and protectionist pressures in the US and Europe hammered the Canadian economy. By winter 1981-82, Canada was mired in the deepest recession since the 1930s.

At the same time, globalization stretched the international agenda, adding subjects almost daily: human rights and women's rights; energy, science, and the environment; sports, culture, and education; global revolution and terrorism. Provinces, cities, and citizens responded, ramping up their global engagement and sending abroad waves of ministers, bureaucrats, and activists.¹

Trudeau sensed these changes and embraced them. By 1968, he was already a man of wide global experience, whose position on world affairs was often a considerable distance from Ottawa's. He disliked the smug stuffiness he found in External Affairs, and he was contemptuous of Pearson for backing an aggressive American crusade against Communism in Asia and Europe. Yet, pragmatically, he acknowledged that Canadian diplomacy must echo the country's Anglo-American inheritance, while bemoaning its failure to reflect Canada's unique bicultural reality. Appalled by the poverty he encountered overseas, he was sympathetic to national liberation movements everywhere. Colonialism, he thought, bred only "hate, suspicion, envy and arrogance." He welcomed the end of Europe's colonial

empires as the most significant development in the second part of the 20th century.

An outsider in so many ways, Trudeau's first priority was to liberate Canadian diplomacy, which he thought dominated by Canada's military alliances - NATO and NORAD. He also wanted to end the country's unhealthy fixation with UN peacekeeping. And, reflecting the era's gathering globalist thrust, he sought to broaden Canadian diplomacy beyond its traditional focus on the North Atlantic to embrace Latin America, Africa, and Asia, especially the People's Republic of China. Tackling these inherited challenges dominated Trudeau's foreign policy during his first two terms in office.

But Trudeau's perspective was also global and systemic, and he grasped the shortcomings of the postwar liberal internationalist order. This was especially obvious in the spring of 1974, when he turned his attention south, toward the impoverished and restless masses of the developing world. Hit hard by the decade's surging oil prices and inspired by OPEC's success, the Global South issued a Declaration on the New

International Economic Order in May 1974. Insisting that the postwar rules of trade, investment, and finance favoured the North, the South demanded radical change in the global economic order.

Trudeau responded to this challenge in the only foreign policy speech of the July 1974 election. "If I were to identify any single criterion by which I hope Canada's presence in the world would be judged," he declared, "I hope it would be its humanism, its pursuit of social justice."² To tackle this priority, he replaced an aging Mitchell Sharp as foreign minister with the more progressive Allan MacEachen. "In the years immediately ahead," he told him in his mandate letter, "we must choose consciously to express our concern about the widespread inequalities found in the world... a strong moral fibre must...be a fundamental ingredient of our foreign policy."³

However large his reform ambitions, Trudeau was a pragmatic realist, and he eventually trimmed his sails in the face of opposition from the bureaucratic establishment, rooted in the departments of Trade and

Finance. During the spring of 1975, he backed a series of more modest incremental measures - notably more aid, commodity price supports, and tariff reductions - to ensure that Canadian policy remained progressive enough to serve as a bridge between North and South, pushing the more important players toward dialogue. US secretary of state Henry Kissinger acknowledged the wisdom of Trudeau's tactics, engineering Canada's selection as the Western co-chair of the Conference on International Economic Cooperation, set up in October 1975 to manage the North-South dialogue.⁴

Dynamic tension between the ideal and the possible characterized Trudeau's diplomacy when North-South relations returned to the top of the global agenda in the late 1970s. The publication of Willy Brandt's report on interdependence, *North-South: A Programme for Survival*, and calls from the G-77, the UN's undeveloped majority, to reopen "Global Negotiations" caught Trudeau's attention. Deputy foreign minister Allan Gotlieb, a hard-nosed realist, who later sneered at Trudeau's "*tier-mondeism*", counselled caution. But Trudeau - determined

to make a difference during his last mandate - was drawn to the project and grasped its radical implications for global order. He was, Foreign Minister Mark MacGuigan recalled, "totally consumed" by the possibilities, and "filled with youthful vigour and idealism."⁵ Trudeau resolved to use three upcoming summits - his G-7 Summit at Montebello, the Melbourne CHOGM, and the Cancun Summit - to remind world leaders of their "responsibility to humanity and the future."⁶

In Trudeau's view that clearly meant designing a world order that more justly reflected the interests of most stakeholders. The prime minister continued: "Power-sharing is the heart of the North-South dialogue and politicians should be able to understand this readily and recognize that it is better to share power now than in the future, even though it may be easier the other way round." What, he asked, could he do to kick-start the process of North-South power-sharing? MacGuigan was quick to reply: rally behind the effort to relaunch "Global Negotiations."⁷

Washington clung to the opposite view. Elected in

November 1980, US president Ronald Reagan wasted no time telling Ottawa that he wanted the Montebello summit to focus on East-West not North-South issues.⁸ Moreover, the White House fretted that Global Negotiations would impinge on GATT and the IMF, key Western levers over the world's economy. Trudeau dug in.⁹ Backed by the Germans, Italians, and Japanese, he insisted that the G-7 explicitly endorse the G-77's call for negotiations. During three G-7 preparatory meetings, Washington held firm. It did so until just days before the leaders began to gather, when it blinked, unwilling to leave Reagan isolated at this, his first summit. To Trudeau's delight, the US commitment to participate in "global negotiations" was made more explicit at the Cancun Summit, and then, at the UN, where the US itself presented a resolution to launch "Global Negotiations" in December 1981.

The text met Canadian expectations, but divided radical and moderate members of the G-77, who struggled through the New Year to frame a response. Trudeau pushed them compromise. In January, he and Mexican president Lopez-Portillo sent an encouraging message to Cancun

participants. A month later, Trudeau despatched Larry Smith, ambassador for North-South relations, on a world tour to get the "process started" without fussing about "the fine print."¹⁰ The endgame was discouraging. The US maintained its a "constructive approach," but Algeria, Iraq, and Libya rejected the US text and imposed their more radical views on the G-77's moderate majority, scuttling the talks once and for all in July 1982.

The end of the search for Global Negotiations had important consequences for the world and Trudeau. It put paid to the notion of a united Global South, and for most of the next two decades, its disparate elements would have to deal individually with an increasingly resurgent and conservative North. It did so just as the implications of globalization and the need for a rebalancing of global power began to be felt.

Closer to home, the collapse of the dialogue left Trudeau disappointed and he blamed the developing world for wasting a "golden opportunity."¹¹ Despite requests from his friends, Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere, and Jamaican prime minister Edward Seaga, Trudeau refused to

bring North-South issues to the G-7 again.¹² Arguably, the South's claim to a greater share of redistributed global power remained on the margins of the international agenda until the G-20 was created in 1999.

Finally, Trudeau's North-South campaign had another, unpredictable consequence. He had watched the US compromise at Ottawa and Cancun, and concluded that Reagan, despite his stature as a conservative ideologue, was essentially a skilled politician, who would bend and yield to pressure.¹³ And this was an insight that would animate Canadian diplomacy during Trudeau's final year in office and shape his next crusade, his 1983-84 peace initiative.

¹ For a fuller descriptions of these changes, see John Hilliker, Mary Halloran, and Greg Donaghy, *Canada's Department of External Affairs: Innovation and Adaptation, 1968-84* (Toronto: UTP, 2017).

² "Notes for the Prime Minister's Remarks to the Canadian Jewish Congress, Toronto, June 16, 1974," RG 25, File 20-2-2-1, Volume 8821, Library and Archives of Canada [LAC].

³ Pierre Trudeau to Allan J. MacEachen, 4 September 1974, Basil Robinson Papers, Volume 21, File 22, LAC.

⁴ For details, see Greg Donaghy, "A Wasted Opportunity: Canada and the New International Economic Order, 1974-82," in Colin McCullough and Robert Teigrob (eds.), *Canada and the United Nations: Legacies, Limits, Prospects* (Kingston: MQUP, 2016), 183-207.

⁵ Mark MacGuigan, Unpublished Memoirs, Global Affairs Canada, Historical Section (PORH), 162.

⁶ Donaghy, "A Wasted Opportunity: Canada and the New International Economic Order, 1974-1982."

7 [Larry Smith], "Memorandum to File: North/South Briefing Session with the Prime Minister," 28 October 1980, RG 25, Vol 13895, File 37-9-3, LAC.

8 Confidential Source.

9 Allan Gotlieb, Memorandum for the Prime Minister, 2 March 1981, RG 25, Vol 15494, File 35-4-ESC-Ottawa-1981, LAC.

10 MacGuigan, Memorandum for the Prime Minister, RG 25, Vol 15705, File 37-9-3-1, LAC.

11 Ottawa to Washington (and other G-7 capitals), tel. ECR- 902, 6 July 1982, RG 25, Vol 14767, File 37-9-8-1, LAC.

12 Trudeau to Julius Nyerere, 23 August 1982; MacEachen, Memorandum to the Prime Minister, 18 March 1983, and ECD/Morantz to PTE, 18 March 1983, ECD-449, RG 25, Vol 13895, File 37-9-3, LAC.

13 See Greg Donaghy, "The 'Ghost of Peace': Pierre Trudeau's Search for Peace, 1982-84," *Peace Research: The Canadian Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*, Vol 39, Nos 1-2 (2007), 36-57.