



Column / Don Newman

Why Justin May Be the Tougher Trudeau

Sons of famous men often have trouble living up to their fathers' accomplishments and reputations. Even if they have what, for most people, would be a perfectly good career, it usually falls short of their father's accomplishments and because of that they are judged to be failures. Even the success they do have is often attributed to their more famous and successful progenitor.

Until the evening of October 19, Justin Trudeau was in danger of falling into that classification. His father, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, was a dominant figure in the second half of the 20th Century as Canada's prime minister — patriating the Constitution, authoring the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, staring down separatist terrorism in October of 1970 and winning the 1980 Quebec referendum. True, all of those actions often generated as much contempt as admiration, but there is no doubt that Trudeau the elder was a larger-than-life figure whose legacy his eldest son Justin inherited when he gave the eulogy at his father's funeral in 2000.

He also threw caution to the wind when, in 2008, he adopted his father's calling and became a politician. Following directly in his father's footsteps invited inevitable comparison, but so far, it is the son who is out-achieving the father.

When people think of Pierre Trudeau they think of his entire political career, and measure Justin against that. What is fair is to consider where Justin is in his own career, and then compare that against where his father was at the same stage in his.

Pierre Trudeau was recruited by the Liberals in 1965 as one of the three Quebec "wise men" to run for the party in the general election that year. Parachuted into the safe, largely anglophone riding of Mount Royal, Trudeau cruised to victory, immediately became one of Prime Minister Lester Pearson's parliamentary secretaries and then was promoted to justice minister. When Pearson stepped down in early 1968, he personally encouraged Trudeau to run to succeed him as Liberal leader. Trudeau automatically became Prime Minister, setting off Trudeaumania and propelling the Liberals to a majority government after two minorities under Pearson. A more gilded pathway to the top smoothed by others is hard to imagine. When he won his majority in June 1968, he was three months shy of his 49th birthday.

Compare that with the younger Trudeau. In 2008 he won a contested nomination in the gritty, franco-phone riding of Papineau in the heart of Montreal, then took on and defeated a previously popular sitting Bloc Québécois MP and won after a tough fight. He entered Parliament and went directly to the backbench on the Opposition side. No one was seeking to smooth his way. Senior Liberals, some with ambitions of their own, were not prepared to risk comparison with a Trudeau, albeit one many were privately dismissing as a lightweight.

After the Liberal debacle of the 2011 election, the party was reduced to a rump of 34 seats, the New Democrats were now the official opposition and many were openly judging the electoral wounds fatal. Liberals and almost everyone in the other political par-

ties still believed that Justin Trudeau was a lightweight and that if he did run for the leadership it would be at a later date. But Trudeau, his friends Gerry Butts, Tom Pitfield, Dominique Leblanc and others realized that if he did not run in 2013, there might not be a party left to lead after another election. As it turned out, this was Trudeau's time.

The historically long 2015 campaign was meant to expose Trudeau as "just not ready," as the Conservative attack ads said. So were a series of debates that Harper contrived and NDP leader Tom Mulcair agreed to. But as the campaign and the debates progressed Trudeau progressed along with them, gaining in confidence and gaining in the polls. By election night, the Liberals and their leader were in full command. Justin Trudeau had taken the Liberals from third place to a majority government of 184 MPs. He was one and a half months short of his forty-fourth birthday—five years younger than his father when he became prime minister—and had conquered a much tougher path.

During one of the debates, after a particularly egregious slur against his father by Mulcair, Trudeau put him in his place with the reply: "I am proud to be the son of Pierre Elliott Trudeau and the values he stood for."

On the night of October 19, you could only imagine the feelings of pride were being reciprocated. **P**

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