

# Trudeau Remembered

**Jean Fournier**

*Edited notes for an address by His Excellency the High Commissioner for Canada, Jean Fournier, on the occasion of the official opening of the Trudeau 1968–84 Photographic Exhibition, Kings Hall, Old Parliament House, Canberra, 24 June 2003. The Exhibition was sponsored by Bombardier Aerospace, the University of Toronto, the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, and Crowne Plaza Canberra.*

Tonight is the highlight of Canada week — the official opening by Foreign Minister Alexander Downer of the Trudeau photographic exhibition 1968–1984, documenting 16 years in the life of Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, one of the dominant figures of twentieth century Canada.

A special welcome to Peter Bregg, Canada's award-winning photojournalist who was just 19 when he photographed Pierre Trudeau's victory at the Liberal Convention in 1968. After Trudeau became Prime Minister, Bregg continued to follow him as a photojournalist for The Canadian Press in Ottawa and later the Associated Press in the United States. Over the years, he has shot some of the most compelling Trudeau images ever captured.

Peter Bregg is currently chief photographer with the Canadian national weekly magazine *Maclean's*. He has selected his favourite photographs of Trudeau, some never published, for this exhibition which will run until September 28.

The timing for this exhibition could not be more propitious. Thirty five years ago, almost to the day, Pierre Trudeau won his first of four elections as Prime Minister, a position he held for sixteen years, becoming our longest serving Prime Minister in the post-war period. And he won that election after only 2½ years in the House of Commons and barely a year in Cabinet as Minister of Justice.

When Trudeau came to office, he brought an astonishing excitement to Canadian public life. In some ways he was a Canadian version of what John F. Kennedy had been to the United States eight years earlier. He identified with and appealed to the idealism of the baby boomers, including myself, who flocked to Ottawa in large numbers, including myself, to join the federal government in response to Trudeau's call for a 'Just Society'.

For a generation of Canadians, he set the tempo and agenda of public life. He was a pillar of Canadian unity. He was passionate about Canada. To this day, his vision of a new and modern Canada endures: bilingual, multicultural, independent, committed to individual freedom and the promotion of fundamental human rights; a vision he fought for to his last breath.

Among his lasting achievements, several stand out:

- the *Official Languages Act* enshrining French and English as the official languages of Canada;
- adoption of multiculturalism as government policy;
- fighting back the first referendum on Qu'bec sovereignty, securing a convincing 'NO';
- patriating the *British North America Act* of 1867 and replacing it with a truly Canadian constitution;
- entrenching in the new constitution a Charter of Rights and Freedoms with guaranteed minority language and education rights as well as certain basic individual rights that cannot be taken away by any government — a victory for the Justice Minister of the day, as well, Jean Chrétien, now Prime Minister of Canada, who more than any federal politician was most responsible for the final accord;
- refusing to give in to terrorists who kidnapped a foreign diplomat and killed a Cabinet minister;
- recognizing and affirming existing Aboriginal and treaty rights;
- making a strong place for Canada in the world, as illustrated by the establishment of diplomatic relations with China in 1971.

His international work, particularly his Peace Initiative to slow down the nuclear arms race, earned him the Albert Einstein Peace Prize.

Trudeau's interest in international affairs went back to his studies at Harvard, the London School of Economics and the Ecole Libre de Sciences Politiques in Paris, after which he set off with a backpack to travel around the world, including Australia.

In his *Memoirs*, he tells how he went through one war zone after another, encountering armed bandits and being arrested in wartime Jordan and Iraq. These adventures and further travels through India and war-torn China help to explain his life-long hatred of narrow nationalism and left him with a deep belief in the rights of the individual and the vital role of government in protecting those rights.

Years later Trudeau came back to Australia as Prime Minister, the first time in 1970 when, after a weekend on the Great Barrier Reef, he visited Canberra and Sydney, as part of a five-nation tour of Asia and the Pacific. He returned in 1981, on the occasion of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Melbourne.

While in Canberra, in May 1970, Trudeau met Prime Minister John Gorton and had discussions with the Cabinet in this very building. He undoubtedly saw the Senate President's Chair, made of Canadian maple, that the Government of Canada presented to the Government of Australia in 1927 and is still in the Senate Chamber here behind me.

He expressed warm feelings towards Australia at the time: 'I have been looking forward to my second visit to Australia to experience once again the beauty of this country, to witness the tremendous accomplishments of its people and to enjoy the warmth of Australian hospitality.'

Official documents of the day — and I have the National Archives of Australia to thank for this — record that the two Prime Ministers talked about multilateral trade, business, investment and technology, relations with the United States, China and the European Community, as well as peacekeeping, foreign aid, ministerial and cultural exchanges. One is tempted to say some thirty years later: 'Plus cela change . . .'

During the same trip in Sydney, Trudeau unveiled a plaque to commemorate the incarceration of 58 French-speaking Canadian prisoners who were transported to Australia in 1840 as punishment for their uprising against British colonial rule. Importantly, Canada achieved responsible government shortly after those uprisings. Trudeau said at the time of the unveiling: 'It stands as a record of our gratitude to those who risked their lives for liberty'.

The granite memorial across the Parramatta River at Cabarita Park also stands as a strong reminder of the strength of Trudeau's commitment to individual freedom and rights. As a personal aside, one of the Quebec convicts was my ancestor, on my father's side. Like most other Canadian convicts, he was eventually pardoned and returned home.

Like the totem pole in front of the Canadian High Commission on Commonwealth Avenue, Trudeau had many different faces. Not only was he a man with a compelling and uncompromising vision, strong values and political courage, he also had great personal style, flair and charisma. He was witty, playful, athletic, loved women and was media-savvy.

A Canberra reporter was suitably impressed by Trudeau's performance at the time: 'Trudeaumania comes to stately Canberra' read the headline. Reporting on the enthusiastic reception Trudeau received in Brisbane, a Sydney paper titled its story: 'Kissing Pierre will wow the girls in Sydney'.

The *enfant terrible* side of Trudeau's personality is captured with great skill by Peter Bregg in this photographic exhibition. Whether it is Trudeau playing with a frisbee, hanging himself with a tie, driving a Mercedes or canoeing in the Arctic, Peter has done a truly remarkable job of covering him. Trudeau's affection for, and trust in, Peter are obvious. He has also enlivened the photographs by including in the captions his recollections of the scenes and the people portrayed there.

Thank you to Peter for bringing Trudeau back to Old Parliament House and for keeping his memory alive for Canadians, Australians and his many admirers around the world.

Old Parliament House, home of Australia's national parliament from 1927 to 1988, is today a museum of political history. It is a special place for Australians with its unique atmosphere, and its mix of history and warmth. Located in the heart of the Parliamentary Triangle, not far from beautiful Commonwealth Place and Speaker's Square, is Canada's gift for Australia's Centenary of Federation in 2001. ▲