

New look at federalism

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"Canadians, at this moment," said the young man, "are intensely concerned with sustaining Canada. Trudeau is seen as the best available instrument; therefore, they would probably look unkindly on any persistent review of Trudeau's errors and misjudgments of the past 10 years, numerous as they are, and I think first of 1970 and how his excess of authority gave impetus to separatism."

The young man is an adviser to a provincial premier. Our subject was the question: Has Trudeau gained any wisdom from a decade in power? Is he as certain about what Confederation must be as back in '67 and '68 when he mocked "co-operative federalism" and two of its offshoot theories; "two nations" and "special status for Quebec."

Both the young man and I think the "inflexible" Trudeau is prepared to give way on his conceptions of federalism.

What Trudeau awaits is the right timing to disclose his change in conception of federalism. And because we are not very historically-minded — and neither are the French Canadians any more — and because we want desperately to save Confederation, Trudeau will likely change positions adroitly.

Let me illustrate my point by references to one situation and then to two men, Claude Ryan, editor of *Le Devoir*, and Jean-Luc Pepin, last month head of the AIB, next month . . . ?

The situation is that of the premier of Ontario and, to a lesser degree, of the premiers of British Columbia and Alberta. Each of these heads of government undoubtedly wants to keep Canada together, and not simply because that is obviously the majority wish of his citizens. Therefore, they are prepared to co-operate with the federal government and its prime minister in developing the strategy, tactics and a mutual understanding of timing and initiatives in what seems certain to be a testing couple of years until a Quebec referendum or the eclipse of the Levesque government by the clear loss of its support in the province.

Think for a minute what it would have done or what

it might do to the federalist campaign if Premier Davis had shown or shows himself open to the kind of "economic association" proposed by the PQ. Of course, he must have talked this over with Trudeau before he rebuffed Levesque and Parizeau.

But what's the "quid pro quo" . . . for Davis, for Lougheed? Neither wants a Canada without Quebec. However positions each has taken in the recent past on a number of federal-provincial issues are counter to Trudeau's inflexibility, his insistence that Quebec (or Alberta or P.E.I. or B.C.) must be a province like the others.

So I think we must assume that Trudeau has privately told Davis and other premiers of his willingness to be flexible once the time has come to spring into the open such readiness (and its scope).

The editor of *Le Devoir*, he's been emerging again as the spokesman for federalism in Quebec. Of course, in English Canada we're piling halos back on him that we let disappear when Trudeau in his arrogances of 1968 and 1970 had cuffed Ryan around with belittlements. Why?

In 1966 and later Ryan spoke for "a two-dimensional equality" in Canada, particularly "the special legal status that Quebec must have in Canada because of her special role." Trudeau didn't accept this line, and he won. Between 1966 and 1968 Trudeau turned the Liberal government away from "special status" or "particular status" or "two nations".

Ryan hasn't changed his ideas on what federalism needs. He's still a federalist and now the best propaganda voice that federalism has in Quebec.

Jean-Luc Pepin's situation has parallels with Ryan. As he himself says, when Trudeau, Marchand, and Pelletier arrived in Ottawa in 1965 to join the Liberal caucus he had some pretenses, as a political scientist in politics, to views on federalism. He was a disciple of "co-operative federalism", the Pearson prescription developed by the Hon. Maurice Lamontagne.

Even more than Lamontagne, Pepin elaborated on the meaning and the "flexibility" of co-operative federalism between 1964 and the pop-up of Trudeau as Pearson's successor in early 1968.

"I put those papers away," says Pepin. "I knew what the new boss thought. He was the authority on the Constitution, Marchand the authority on social measures, Pelletier on cultural. What was left for me? Obviously . . . the economic, the financial."

Now Pepin seems certain of a formal role in sustaining federal Canada. Like Ryan, he hasn't changed his views on federalism, merely held them in abeyance until time has seemed to prove, Trudeau's are inadequate.

So I'm saying that if Trudeau stays as prime minister and I think he's going — it is very likely that it won't be as the Trudeau of "Federalism and The French Canadians", that bestseller book of 1968.