

The *Papers*... A Beginning

When embarking on any work, wrote the great Italian author Cesare Pavese, nothing is more important than the “richness of the point of view.” When I consider the five texts assembled in this first edition of *The Trudeau Foundation Papers*, I have absolutely no doubt that this criterion has been fulfilled.

The authors are all exceptional academics and renowned researchers, carefully chosen as Trudeau Fellows because of their intellectual rigour and commitment to social engagement. But in addition to this academic standard and sense of commitment, and as important, each Fellow has developed keen personal observations rooted in his or her own experience, the ability to discover new connections and relationships, and the gift of being able to articulate the relevance of particular insights within specific contexts. Each Fellow speaks with a unique and deeply individual voice from a very dynamic and sophisticated point of view.

This predilection for individuality and originality animates all Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation programs. Those who knew the man whose memory the Foundation honours would scarcely be surprised. Pierre Trudeau himself said it best: “To ‘ready-made’ or second-hand ideas, I have always preferred my own.” Trudeau showed

a passion for fashioning original ideas and expressing them in the first person, without shying away from debate. The Foundation exists to reward and encourage the virtues of our former Prime Minister, including the energetic audacity of exceptional individuals willing to wrestle with critical contemporary questions.

The Trudeau Lectures are a series of public talks that feature the work of our Trudeau Fellows and publicize their achievements in areas of the country where they have yet to enjoy the reputation they clearly deserve. Published here in this first edition of the *Papers*, these lectures are unique in Canada. While the Fellows are inevitably focused on themes dear to the Foundation, we do not impose either the topic or tone of the series. We do require the usual rigour expected of a public intellectual, but with an over-arching desire to reach a wider audience and as a step toward public engagement, we also ask that the Fellows avoid the usual forms of scholarly communication. Consequently, as you shall see, some of the text is experimental in nature. Some have chosen the voice of autobiographical discourse, some make proposals for social action, others debate.

The Foundation decided to focus its efforts on four areas of research and reflection: human rights, citizenship, the environment and international affairs. This was no arbitrary choice, for the problems that arise in these four areas are, in fact, the crucial problems of democracy at the start of this 21st century: How do we encourage the exercise of human rights? What are the definition and obligations of citizenship? How do we prevent environmental degradation? What are the implications of globalization for Canadians?

Each Trudeau Fellow works within their own sphere, while remaining committed to the essential work of clarifying the relevance of their research to the themes of the Foundation, with the goal of proposing solutions. It is well recognized that the knowledge produced in the social sciences and humanities is not always directly comparable to that produced in the natural or life sciences. It is not a

question of maturity or rigour: in all the sciences, true knowledge is tenuous and necessarily includes some uncertainty because it is subject to constant revision—sociology or history is no different here from physics or biology. The difference lies elsewhere, particularly in the range of reactions people might have to knowledge that directly concerns them—whether they use it to advantage, for example, or take umbrage.

Shana Poplack is an example of someone who is passionate about the use of French in a minority milieu. To that end, she misses no opportunity to provoke reactions even in the very communities she studies. The evening she gave her Trudeau Lecture at the University of Moncton, the reactions of the audience were palpable, shifting in response to the way her words resonated with the people's predispositions. Eric Helleiner's Trudeau Lecture at the University of Lethbridge took place right in the middle of the financial storm of autumn 2008, reassuring a community hard hit by the market crash and failure of the global economy.

In St. John's, Newfoundland, the room was packed on the evening William Rees gave his Trudeau Lecture on environmental policy. His tone was solemn and his remarks sombre to an audience looking for frank answers about ways to tug on the reins of a society intoxicated with growth and expansion. Joseph Yvon Thériault, a self-described "poacher" of ideas, challenged some preconceptions held by members of the audience who might have preferred to consider aspects of Canadian society, absent elements of our history and politics.

I was moved by the Trudeau Lecture given by Will Coleman at the University of Northern British Columbia. The talk was brilliant and erudite, a great researcher's insight into an extraordinary array of questions and ideas prompted by globalization, but the real event that took place that evening was in the faces and eyes of the students. By illustrating the intimate connections between his personal journey

and the tools of political analysis, by demonstrating that it is possible to detach oneself in order to produce original and important scientific work, and by patiently explaining how people can step outside themselves without betraying their origins or denying their people, Will Coleman proved that he is also an educator *extraordinaire*.

The Trudeau Lectures and the *Papers* will continue to evolve. The Foundation has already identified ten Fellows who will participate in the next two series, taking up the role of public intellectuals, revealing their passions, exploring the hypotheses and understandings that they believe to be critical to considerations of the public good. Of course, a lecture does not provide sufficient time to explicate a system of thought. Ideas need time to germinate. The Foundation is convinced it is playing a crucial role here, which is to give researchers a public venue to express their ideas where they can freely share their certainties alongside their doubts, their new insights and perhaps their indignation at the lack of attention paid to older ones.

This space for expression already exists within the university, where it is obviously jealously guarded. But we know for certain that it is not enough. The social sciences and humanities require as many opportunities for public engagement as possible. Our societies are bombarded with disjointed information, industry advertorials, and contradictory solutions to problems. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the public often meets so-called experts or political platforms with mistrust or even outright hostility. We are not seeking rehashed ideas, peremptory retorts or trite slogans. Rather we desire tools to help us understand, frameworks to help us make choices, new ideas to ground our actions.

In truth, in our collective spheres, even the standard approaches to “popularizing” academic knowledge often lead to an impasse, if not outright misunderstanding. It is critical that researchers in the social sciences and humanities not place themselves outside or above society. The challenge of discovering the right voice and the

appropriate stance *vis-à-vis* knowledge remains, but it is clear that there is a certain urgency for us to engage in an open dialogue on the issues that disquiet democracies. These five Trudeau lectures are permeated with this desire, and are authentic invitations by outstanding intellectuals. It is a beginning.

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