

Trudeau on summitry

by Michel Vastel

May 26, 1982: *Well, they went in there and they were disagreeing on many things, but each has moved a little bit on something . . .*

June 10, 1982: *When you get sixteen heads of State and Government together, and they travel for many thousands of miles to meet on such an important subject as the North Atlantic Alliance, I think they should be expected to be more than rubber stamping a Communiqué which has been cooked, pre-cooked, and that all their job is to put a stamp on it and say "Okay!"*

There is no exchange, there is no deepening of the consensus within the Alliance, there is no effort at persuading each other . . . and nobody has a chance to say: "Well, why did you say that? And where did you get this idea? And what makes you think that?"

So, that is a bit of a pity.

Pierre Trudeau

Pierre Trudeau, 63, more than fourteen years in power, has a good chance to be doyen at any international summit which Canada attends. It does not hurt, too, to lead a bicultural former colony in the British Empire. Each year Trudeau goes to the NATO and Economic Summits, the UN when he wants to; and in the near future there will be two more international gatherings, the Commonwealth and La Francophonie.

Given such opportunities, and the obvious delight Pierre Trudeau gets out of joining other leaders from around the world, why then is he so critical of Summitry?

There are at least two major reasons for his frustration: the format of the meeting which Trudeau — quite properly, I believe — criticized in Bonn last summer; and Trudeau's own problem of being the head of a nation which — by tradition more than by size and power — has no interest in being a leader.

The "Joseph Lunn" formula

Wrapping up the NATO Summit in Bonn last June, a particularly upset Pierre Trudeau stated: "I do not think this type of Summit can be very productive." An under-

statement, as he made clear. Apart from Trudeau's natural aversion to "rubber-stamping cooked and pre-cooked" statements of any kind (he himself works hard on his own major speeches), the Prime Minister of Canada complained about the time-schedule, the format of the Conference and the heavy hand the bureaucracy of an organization like NATO has on the substance of the meeting itself. One can apply such criticisms to other international organizations, such as the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund, where the permanent staff has a major say in all gatherings of the leaders they serve. This control by the professional bureaucracy has been called the "Joseph Lunn formula," after the domineering Secretary-General of NATO.

As far as the time-schedule is concerned, Trudeau points out that "It cannot be very productive if sixteen heads of state and government have something like four to five hours to talk about [such fundamental issues as] the Alliance." Time constraints impose a very rigid format on large gatherings such as NATO's or the UN's. In fact, each of the participants has time to make one speech, and Trudeau comments, "There is no exchange, there is no effort at persuading each other." Moreover, the party line imposed by the organization's bureaucracies is very strict. "Then," Trudeau says, "they each make speeches which are nothing more than paraphrases of the Communiqué which has been drafted in Brussels — or New York, or Geneva — by people who have been working for years together." At most, some outspoken leader — such as Ronald Reagan — will depart from his text and throw across the table: "I know how to deal with Communists. I turned them out of the Artists' Union in Hollywood!" By the time anybody has a chance to say: "Why did you say that?" President Reagan is back to his prepared text and the dust settles. The bureaucracy likes this formula — no exchange, therefore no chance of discord. But to have Spain and the United Kingdom agreeing on the same text — right in the middle of the Falklands crisis — it has to be very diluted and not very meaningful!

This is not to say that NATO, as an alliance of sixteen democracies, is meaningless. Its strength as a group — especially a military alliance — is not questioned. But it is not an appropriate forum for the deepening of consensus. So, apart from being strongly united against a potential aggressor, what is the purpose of the alliance when faced with such a crisis as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, or even with a conflict or political tensions between two of its

Michel Vastel is Ottawa Correspondent for Le Devoir of Montreal. He accompanied Prime Minister Trudeau on his Summit trips in 1982, where the quotations printed here were recorded in open press conferences. He is also Editor of our sister publication, the quarterly Perspectives internationales.