

# Trudeau: In search of a hot issue

OTTAWA

After three weeks of travelling from Victoria to St. John's, it is relatively easy to assess the national campaigns of the four leaders.

The Prime Minister has made a slow and unspectacular start. Conservative Leader Robert Stanfield has done better than expected. NDP Leader David Lewis has obtained extraordinary results from his economy-class campaign. Social Credit Leader Real Caouette's national campaign has helped the party primarily in Quebec.

But this assessment is of limited value in determining the shape of the total campaign at the halfway mark and its probable development in October. The intense activity of the leaders has done little more than set the stage and provide the overture for the real performance that is now beginning and that will involve, by the end of the month, a cast of millions.

There are undertones in the overture that presage a scenario of growing complexity.

The very success of the Lewis campaign, for instance, already hints at future problems for the NDP leader. The "corporate welfare" issue has become so powerful that Lewis is now campaigning, in effect, on a single issue—a type of campaign that is unusual for the NDP and was totally unexpected only a few months ago.

## Trapped by success

Lewis has tried in the past month to talk about positive aspects of his platform, but "corporate welfare" is the only thing that makes headlines and keeps him highly visible.

If he tries to broaden his campaign this month, he will run the risk of appearing to lose momentum. Whether he can escape from this consequence of his own success, and develop a campaign that will be remembered for more than a catch-phrase, is the main question for the NDP in October.

The success of the Stanfield campaign also cannot be taken as an unmixed blessing for the Conservatives. While it has improved the par-

ty's morale, it has also lessened any tendency among Liberals to take the election for granted, and any assumption by the public that the Liberals are strong enough to absorb a large number of protest votes and still retain their majority.

The assessment of the long-term influence of the leaders' campaigns to date is complicated by the absence of strong national trends. There are national issues in this campaign, but the over-all picture is still a mosaic of distinctive regional situations.

In British Columbia, for instance, the NDP provincial victory has been the dominant political topic during the first part of the federal campaign. In Quebec, on the other hand, interest in the federal campaign is apparent, mainly because the anti-campaign of the Parti Quebecois and the entry of Claude Wagner as a Conservative have drawn attention to the campaign since it started.

Ontario has been quiet on the surface. The complexity of the Ontario scene has been illustrated by the tendency of political commentators to divide the province into three zones—Metro Toronto, urban Ontario outside of Toronto, and rural Ontario—and to be cautious about seeing trends in any of them.

Only the Maritimes presents a fairly conventional picture at the moment, with voter interest at an average level and no spectacular changes in prospect.

Despite the dynamics of the leadership campaign, most Canadians encountered at random by this journalist in three weeks of travel seem to expect a Liberal majority. This feeling will be strengthened if the Liberal campaign is able to capitalize on its slow start to create an impression of

accelerating upward movement in the final weeks.

Up to this point, the strategy of the Prime Minister's campaign has puzzled the opposition parties. One of Stanfield's key advisers, by the end of last week, had decided that Trudeau was in fact "looking and groping for his own piece of real estate in this campaign, and hasn't yet been able to find it."

This both pleased and worried the Conservative strategist.

"When he finds it," he said, "it'll be like someone fired a gun."

## Still listening

But the men who are plotting the Trudeau campaign insist that everything has gone according to plan. They say that the Prime Minister has spent the first half of the campaign, as predicted, listening to people across the country and explaining his record, and that this month will see a progressive exposure of his plans and priorities for a second term.

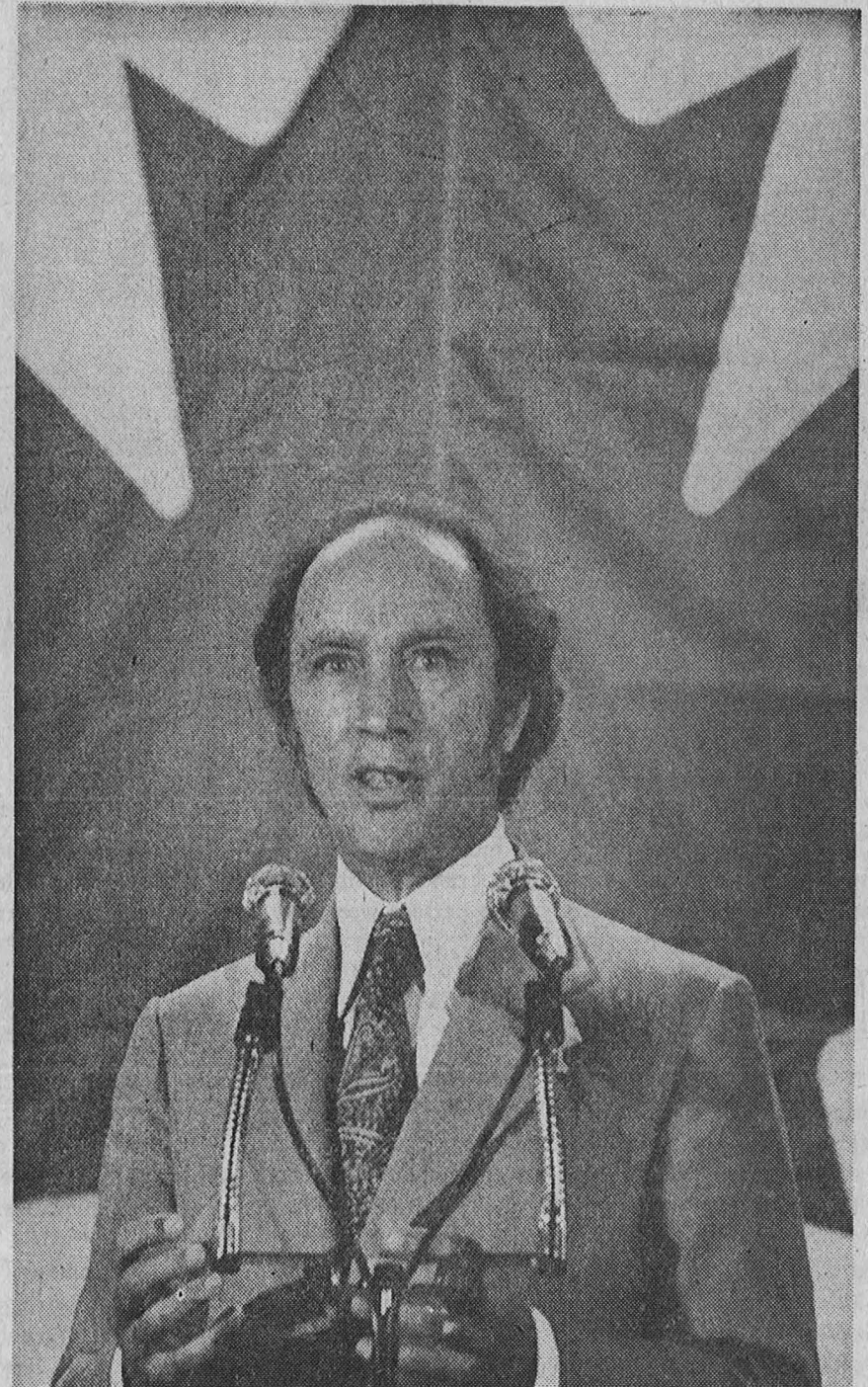
While a busier schedule for the Prime Minister is anticipated in the closing weeks, the Liberal strategists are discouraging speculation about headline-making announcements or changes in the Prime Minister's campaign style.

The main reason for this is that the style of the campaign is very much the Prime Minister's own idea. He has found it more satisfying than the 1968 campaign and he intends to continue his "conversation" with the electorate up to the end.

Whatever the outcome on Oct. 30 for the Liberals, it will be, as in 1968, but in a completely different way, very much the responsibility of Pierre Trudeau.



Peter Desbarats  
Ottawa editor



—Star photo by Doug Griffin

PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU is carrying on a low-key campaign, says Peter Desbarats, but his opponents fear he'll move fast if he finds a hot issue.