

# The Prince of Pine Avenue and the *Père de la Patrie*: A Machiavellian Analysis of Pierre Trudeau and Rene Lévesque

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## Abstract

This study was inspired by the remarkable number of Machiavellian references we noted in journalistic and scholarly accounts of the 1970 War Measures Act and the Québec Referendum that followed a decade later. The notion that Machiavelli's insights in the sixteenth century might have utility for a critique of 20th century Quebecois political life seemed outrageous and we wanted to explore the validity of such associations. There's nothing wrong with this. We wanted to see if there was more to them than the shorthand of short-cycle journalism or if they actually possessed enough analytical force to usefully illustrate aspects of that period of Quebec's history. We discovered that the Machiavellian lens was remarkably illuminating, especially with respect to the clash of two of Quebec's most influential personalities, Pierre Trudeau and Rene Lévesque although, with the notable exception of Denis Arcand, the connections made at the time failed to extend much beyond attempts to make *ad hominum* slurs against the principle actors in the drama.

## Keywords

Machiavelli, Trudeau, Lévesque, Quebec Politics

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## 1. Introduction

Florence is 6400 kilometres away from Montreal and Machiavelli has been dead for almost 500 years and yet the political circumstances that informed sixteenth century Florence appear to resonate in modern Montreal more than in any city in North America. In 1982, Denis Arcand, one of Québec's most important filmmakers, released the prize winning *Le Confort et L'indifférence* (Comfort and Indifference), a documentary that ex-

amined Québec's attempt to separate from Canada during the 1980 referendum (Arcand, 2009). In addition to the splices of "interviews, speeches and scenes of daily life" depicting the almost religious zeal and stunning naivety of both parties (Johnson, 1982), the film is punctuated throughout by the "pungent little aphorisms" of Niccolò Machiavelli played by Jean-Pierre Ronfard (Corbeil, 1982). The putative hero of the film was René Lévesque, a man whom Hugh Winsor once described as "a mixture of Joan of Arc and Machiavelli" (Winsor, 1980). The film begins with René Lévesque giving a speech in Paris that announces the "impending historic moment when a people will achieve maturity, historic inevitability and independence" (Johnson, 1982). In one of the rare occasions when the media accurately applied a Machiavellian perspective to contemporary Quebecois events, Arcand depicts Premier René Lévesque as the weak prince who made the crucial mistake of entering the debate on terms dictated by his enemies (Corbeil, 1982). Machiavelli's "declamations on the impossibilities of change without force (cut to the Queen inspecting federal troops) and on the ineffectuality of seeking allies who have no power (cut to Lévesque getting the *Legion D'Honneur* in Paris) manage to put some historical perspective on the proceedings" (Corbeil, 1982).

Of course the context of Machiavelli's advice affected its temper and Trudeau and Lévesque's struggle for the province of Québec did not occur over the sound of cold steel clashing on the battlefield but in the flashing glare of cameras and the incessant questions of journalists that form the backdrop to the modern political arena. Although the two men fought for their *patria*—a matter of supreme importance to renaissance adversaries (Parel, 1986)—and the rhetoric of their followers was often laced with bellicose phrases, they could never hope to resolve matters in the same conclusive and satisfactory manner which is inherent to war. "They cannot be called wars in which men are not killed, cities are not sacked, principalities are not destroyed, for these wars come to such weakness that they were begun without fear, carried on without danger, and ended without loss" (Machiavelli, 1988: p. 186). Indeed, despite the *oui* side's assurance of impending cultural genocide and Chretien's threat of higher gas prices, little of material significance was actually at stake beyond the egocentric concerns of the protagonists (Arcand, 1982). It is not surprising therefore that, despite appearances, the two men's final confrontation in Ottawa 1981 resulted in mutual anticlimax; ultimately neither man succeeded in uniting or separating Québec from Canada; while the narrow *non* victory left the province materially secure but in an emotional state of ambivalence.

The disunity and confusion that plagued Quebec in the 1980's has ameliorated somewhat as we write. For Machiavelli this was only natural, in that "usually provinces go most of the time... from order to disorder, and then pass again from disorder to order, for worldly things are not allowed by nature to stand still" (Machiavelli, 1988: p. 186). Nevertheless, Quebec's rural citizens stand accused of bigotry, linguistic and ethnic divisions remain prevalent and the patience of Quebecois citizens for the religious and cultural expression of foreigners is markedly dwindling; a circumstance that would have saddened both Trudeau and Lévesque, suggesting that neither man won the long-view battle for the hearts and minds of *la belle Provence*.

"I have often considered that the cause of the bad and of the good fortune of men is the matching of the mode of one's proceeding with the times".

(Machiavelli, 1996: p. 239)

Efforts to examine Canadian history through a Machiavellian lens have generally focused on the actions of former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau. Most of those analyses have come from journalists and they have routinely observed—usually without citing any specific examples—that many of Trudeau's most memorable moments had an underlying Machiavellian quality (Laforest, 1995: pp. 111-114; Zolf, 1984: pp. 94-96).

When journalists use the term Machiavellian, they tend to think of secular, experiential, morally ambiguous (not to say deviously extreme) approaches to governance and as a result fail to note that Machiavelli also discussed the nature of the mystical, if not semi-divine, aura that accompanied rulers who governed well (King, 2008: pp. 288-291). B. W. Powe notes this symbolic quality when he advances the notion of Trudeau as a "mythical figure" and claims that such an image was consciously perpetuated throughout his career in Canadian politics. An ironic turn of events in the legacy of a man who once told Lévesque: "If you want to talk about symbols, I'm not even going to bother talking to you!" (Tough, 2008)

## 2. Trudeau and the October Crisis

Among all the men praised by Machiavelli the founders of either republics or kingdoms are second only to the founders of religions (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 31). Although Pierre Elliot Trudeau did not literally found a Canadian republic, he is generally held responsible for severing the country's last substantial colonial ties with Britain.

By repatriating the constitution, Trudeau established the fundamental principles according to which Canada would be governed. However, despite the very Machiavellian imperative behind the repatriation, it was the employment of the War Measures Act in October 1970 that led to a proliferation in the comparisons between Trudeau and Machiavelli. For Larry Zolf, the Act “allowed Trudeau to drop the Platonic gown and try on the robe of Machiavelli” (Laucius, 2000). Zolf may have been referring to Machiavelli’s belief that it was strategically important for a head of state to seem pious while also being able to put his rational self aside whenever he needed to act (Machiavelli, 1998: pp. 70-71). Barry Cooper has argued that Trudeau was Machiavelli’s shrewdest pupil: “More than anything, he embodied both the strength and the weakness of a new prince.” (Cooper, 2000) That strength was already in full display when Trudeau adamantly refused to budge during the 1969 St. Jean Baptiste Day riot in Montreal, an act that Carolyn Souaid believes foreshadowed his mobilization of the troops (Souaid, 2007). Although opinion polls suggested that most Canadians supported Trudeau’s move; Lucien Bouchard, formally an enthusiastic federalist, was not among them. Bouchard, who would go on to become the unofficial leader of the Québec sovereignty movement during the 1995 referendum remarked on Trudeau’s approach to politics in Québec: “We didn’t know Machiavelli before. We know him now” (Dougherty, 1993). Bouchard’s critique was prescient and the impression was long lasting: “At a 1980 first ministers’ conference, a unidentified premier was overheard to say that if Machiavelli were around today, he’d be quoting Trudeau” (Bronskill, 2000).

Despite all the Machiavellian disapprobrium however it was not Trudeau in the end who most closely followed Machiavelli’s advice, as least as far as political violence is concerned; although it might have initially seemed that way to Canadians shocked at seeing troops on the streets of a major Canadian city. *The Prince* affirms that when *fortuna* plans to make a new prince great, she will help him acquire a good reputation by making enemies arise for him to overcome (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 85). Swept into power after only two years in politics, Trudeau could not have asked for a better foe to crush than the *Front de Libération du Québec* (FLQ). The separatist group’s terrorist bombings and its kidnapping of British Trade Commissioner James Cross and Minister of Labor Pierre Laporte triggered the October Crisis and gave Trudeau the perfect opportunity to demonstrate exactly who held the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence in Quebec (Handler, 1998: p. 9). Exactly how this was to be done however, was a matter of some delicacy.

### 3. Political Sublime

*The Prince* suggests that the most effective way to re-order a city on the brink of a crisis is not through the efficiently measured use of force, but through the application of an aesthetic effect we might call the *political sublime*. This involved the use of precisely executed yet extremely theatrical violence that asserted one’s right to rule (King, 2008: pp. 288-291). This is not to be confused with the thuggishly authoritarian violence that has so often been assumed to constitute the core of Machiavelli’s advice, but rather involved a series of acts, staged every five years or so, that were so outlandish, so spectacular, so obviously unconstrained by the laws of codified civil behavior that the result would be the same as that achieved by God when He chose to exact his own punishments on mortal beings without explanation or rational justification.

Those who governed the state of Florence from 1432 up to 1494 [the Medici family] used to say, to this purpose, that it was necessary to regain the state every five years; otherwise it was difficult to maintain it. They called regaining the state putting that terror and that fear in men that had been put there in taking it, since at that time they had beaten down those who, according to that mode of life, had worked for ill. But as the memory of that beating is eliminated, men began to dare to try new things and to say evil; and so it is necessary to provide for it, drawing the state back toward its beginnings (Machiavelli, 1996: p. 211).

An important aspect of sublime terror is the effect on the viewer, which is that it is both “satisfying and stupefying” (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 30-31). “The violence is indeed accepted, but it is violence all the same attesting to the properly ‘irresistible’ character of the sublime. The dazzled witness then tends to identify with the source, acting as if the constraint emanated not from without, but from within himself” (Kelly, 1998: p. 323).

Despite tremendous pressure to resort to politically sublime actions himself, the religiously agnostic Lévesque refused to countenance violent means to power (Paulin, 2004: p. 31). When asked by a reporter if he would be prepared to fight for Canada, Lévesque replied, “would Canada fight to keep Quebec in against its will?” He answered his rhetorical question by stating that Canada had “no illusions on that score”... they were too “civilized” (Brittain, 1986). It is indeed hard to imagine any civilized politician resorting to such a morally ambiguo-

ous tactic; however, the Jesuit trained prime minister appeared happy at the outset of the October Crisis to have the country “just watch him” create a theatrical public spectacle with conspicuously deployed troops and military vehicles and revel in its politically electrifying effect. Trudeau’s Jesuit training was not irrelevant to his intellectual embrace of the aesthetic power of the politically sublime. In 1589, one of Machiavelli’s first critics, a Jesuit named Giovanni Botero, noticed something in Machiavelli’s *Prince*, which he immediately recognized as a useful missing link in his order’s approach to the newly discovered and un-baptized people of the Americas. Recognizing the potential of this new political application of an ancient idea, Botero dubbed it the “*politics of the sublime*” (Kahn, 1994: p. 77).

Québec’s democratic context meant that without the FLQ bombings and kidnappings in the fall of 1970, Trudeau would have had no excuse to initiate an act of the political sublime. However, once the group escalated their violence Trudeau became determined to root out what he labelled the “cancer of an armed, revolutionary movement”; he shocked and stupefied the nation by putting troops in the streets of Montreal (Brittain, 1986). However, the ferocious act that left Quebecers most *satisfied and stupefied*, was not enacted by Trudeau but by the FLQ. With a precision that belied the actual chaotic events that surrounded his murder, an FLQ communiqué stated that at 6.18 on the night of October 17 Pierre Laporte had been executed and that his body was in the trunk of a car in the St. Hubert airport parking lot (Tetley, 2007: p. 143). This execution and the *tableau mort* at the airport, which the television cameras burned into the public’s consciousness, mimicked Machiavelli’s primary exemplar of the sublime, Cesare Borgia’s spectacular execution of his boyhood friend Remirro de Lorqua; who was “placed one morning in the piazza at Cesena in two pieces, with a piece of wood and a bloody knife beside him. The ferocity of this spectacle left the people at once *satisfied and stupefied*” (Machiavelli, 1998: pp. 29-30).

Robert Lemieux, the FLQ’s attorney, PQ MNA Claude Charron and even René Lévesque himself blamed the government for Laporte’s death (Tetley, 2007: pp. 141-143). Machiavelli claims that the people want two things, “one, to be avenged against those that are the cause that it is servile; the other to recover its freedom” (Machiavelli, 1996: p. 46). Quebec’s response to the sublime events of 1970 is especially interesting in that while it got neither nominal objectives, at least initially both parties appeared to gain from the violent politics that had been engendered. As Machiavelli notes, the “prince may secure himself sufficiently if he avoids being hated and keeps the people satisfied with him” (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 73). The FLQ, if not actively supported, were certainly not hated by significant portions of Quebec society (Tetley, 2007: p. 70). While they were eventually destroyed by their attempt to raise their violence to sublime levels, Jacques Rose, one of Laporte’s murderers, still received a standing ovation from the PQ convention more than a decade later (Fraser & Owen, 2003: p. 311).

After his flippant “just watch me” comment Trudeau quickly regained a democratic politician’s composure, perhaps recognizing the truth in Machiavelli’s assurance that “on the part of the conspirator there is nothing but fear, jealousy, and the anticipation of terrifying punishment; but on the part of the prince there is the majesty of the principality, the laws, the protection of friends and of the state which defend him” (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 73). The use of the military by Trudeau was sufficient to overawe the general population, going above and beyond what Canadians at the time expected from a Prime Minister. Although less than half of the 419 people arrested were ever charged; the kidnappings stopped, the men responsible were apprehended and Trudeau’s popularity rose all throughout Canada with his actions being supported by 89% of Anglo-Canadians and by an astonishing 86% of Francophones (Tetley, 2007: p. 188). The fact that Trudeau did not raise the stakes beyond the newly established “sublimity bar” of the terrorists’ execution of Laporte, was in the end, a more astute reading of the Canadian citizen’s tolerance of extreme violence. While in the short term neither side gained an outright victory from the exercise, in the long-run the government’s resolution and Lévesque’s disinterest in violent solutions led the nation away from the kind of internecine violence that plagued Northern Ireland, Spain, Italy and West Germany throughout the 70’s and 80’s. Lévesque doubtless intuited Machiavelli’s advice that “[a prince] should examine what causes are those that make [peoples] desire to be free. He will find that a small part of them desires to be free so as to command, but all the others, who are infinite, desire freedom so as to live secure” (Machiavelli, 1996: p. 46).

Despite his deft handling of the FLQ crisis, *fortuna* would not always be so kind to Trudeau and as an exemplar of a Machiavellian *politicien réussie* (successful politician) rather than a *politique manqué* (political disappointment) he was not long-lived. His greatest foe, René Lévesque, was an intellectual with a populist brand of nationalism that differed greatly from that promulgated by the FLQ and whose star was in the ascendancy. “He is happy who adapts his mode of proceeding to the qualities of the times; and similarly, he is unhappy whose

procedure is in disaccord with the times” (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 99). Trudeau, unable to vary his approach, would fail to distinguish between the different forms of nationalism on offer and it would soon cost the country dearly (Brittain, 1986). In the *Discourses on Livy* Machiavelli claims that while some act in an impulsive manner and others with hesitation and caution, both ways of proceeding can bring success. Nevertheless, both forms are also inherently limited; the ruler who is fortunate enough to match the times with the manner in which they proceed is thus bound to make fewer errors (Machiavelli, 1996: p. 239). However, a man who successfully proceeds in one mode is unlikely to ever change (Machiavelli, 1996: p. 240). If a ruler does not learn to conform to the times he is bound to be ruined. Trudeau’s sublime “gunslinger” style served him well during the October Crisis, however, a decade later, he had no constitutional agreement; his great promise of a Just Society had not materialized and Lévesque’s referendum loomed over his head like the sword of Damocles (Brittain, 1986). After a series of unexciting conferences, the gunslinger attitude had clearly become a political liability and the sublime prince had little to show for his eleven years in power. The Prime Minister pressed through with his unpopular and idealistic commitment to public service bilingualism, while Canadians were more focused on gas prices and jobs; Trudeau’s sublime rhetoric no longer matched the parochial concerns of the population (Chodos 1991: p. 56). “Only the epic Canadian landscape had [Trudeau’s] kind of strength, he seemed to have no understanding of weakness, of the frailties and the fears of the common Canadian, to millions he had become a bully and they didn’t need him anymore” (Brittain, 1986). As a result, Trudeau lost the election, stepped down from the Liberal Party leadership and returned chastened to Montreal; a foot soldier in the fight against Lévesque’s sovereignty movement. Still determined to crush Québec nationalism, Trudeau’s vision was to merge the province with the rest of Canada; however, his efforts only made the sovereign movement stronger (Paquin, 2001: pp. 177-178). Had he taken Machiavelli’s advice and let the Quebecois live according to their own laws and kept its elite in need of the prime minister’s friendship (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 20), the results may have been less frustrating for him personally and, more importantly, less dangerous for the unity of the country.

After Trudeau died in September 2000, 60,000 people paid their respects in Ottawa, followed by 15,000 at Montreal city hall who applauded and wept, Canadian flags in hand, as he made his final journey through Montreal to the Basilica. 3000 more stood for hours outside Notre Dame Cathedral to pay their respects to a larger than life presence who had touched their lives without his ever actually having met most of them (Globe & Mail, 2000). The official mourners would not have been out of place at the funeral of a renaissance ruler. Prince Andrew represented the Queen while Fidel Castro, Jimmy Carter, and the Aga Khan were honorary pallbearers. The current prime-minister Jean Chrétien and three former prime ministers, Joe Clark, John Turner, and Brian Mulroney were also in attendance. Just as the funerals of Medici princes were opportunities for the political baton to be passed on to the eldest son, Justin Trudeau’s eulogy was regarded by many as his first major speech in a nascent political campaign that would attempt to complete what his father had been unable to accomplish (Peritz, 2007).

### 3.1. Lévesque: Père de la Patrie

*“Fortresses are generally much more harmful than useful”*

(Machiavelli, 1996: p. 184)

Lévesque’s sovereignty movement at least made sure that Canada would never take its French speaking population for granted again. However, despite Anglo assumptions that he possessed an instinctual understanding of Machiavellian strategy, Lévesque’s attempt at separating Québec from Canada arguably failed because he lacked the cutthroat *virtù* that a Machiavellian founder must embody. In many respects he was more traditionally virtuous than *virtù*(ous), and “he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation” (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 61). Blind adherence to conventional virtue can lead to the vice of political ruin and Lévesque could be accused of such a lapse when he expressed his confidence that Canada would not keep Québec within confederation against its will. Trudeau, in comparison, had no qualms about proclaiming to a crowd of supporters that even if the Québec referendum passed he would not feel obliged to negotiate its separation (Brittain, 1986). If Trudeau’s renaissance exemplar for good or ill was Cesare Borgia, Lévesque should have paid closer attention to the example of Savonarola, the charismatic republican cleric who refused to prepare for the inevitable moment when the force of imaginative rhetoric needed to give way to the less imaginative rhetoric of force.

Lévesque, like Machiavelli, had an instrumental view of religion, even as its direct influence was waning in Quebec’s major cities. He exhibited none of the religious zeal of Laurin, Laberge, Payne, Dumont, Rocher or



even Claude Ryan (Fraser & Owen, 2003: pp. 94-96), since he was prescient enough to recognize that religion, as a marker of difference and unification, had already been supplanted by language. Despite the fact that he was opposed to the language laws he ushered in under Bill 101, he recognized the transition of the Québécois' fear from one of religious assimilation to one of linguistic assimilation and that he was the new leader in the fight for their preservation (Fraser & Owen, 2003: p. 270). In combination with the xenophobia that chilled the souls of the Anglophone minority in the province, Lévesque's rhetorical technique involved creating a more positive nationalist fervor through the steady expansion of things to be considered patrimonial; a process Durkheim described as the "contagiousness of the sacred" (Handler, 1998: p. 152). Cultural artifacts, monuments, language and unique geological features were all "sacralized... by surrounding them with rules designed to isolate them from social space and historical time" (Handler, 1998: p. 152). In this way Lévesque turned the development of a nationalist culture into a fervent pseudo-religious crusade that offered even the least worthy Québec citizen a stake in the promised land of an independent and free nation. Machiavelli warns that "many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth" (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 61). However, if you are determined to establish one, as Savonarola did in 1494, you should remember that imaginative constructions such as a nation have limited salience in the life world of citizens and the decision to found the state had to be made irreversible before the parochial reality of such a decision set in. "The nature of peoples is variable; and it is easy to persuade them of something, but difficult to keep them in that persuasion. And thus things must be ordered in such a mode that when they no longer believe, one can make them believe by force" (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 24).

Nevertheless, Lévesque's ingrained decency caused him to disavow the political sublime and, rather than escalating violence through armed uprising, Lévesque choose to fight for sovereignty through the ballot box (Brittain, 1986). This was the decision that Denis Arcand's documentary focused on in its attempt to unravel how the people of Quebec could have rejected the emancipation of their own *patria* or fatherland (Parel, 1986). Machiavelli is often used in the film as the vehicle to express Arcand's cynicism towards the political process and his conviction that a certain degree of sublime violence was in order during such extraordinary times. His Machiavelli character notes that it is better to be feared than loved by the people, adding that men are often unreliable lazy hypocrites that are more enamored of money than honor or glory. According to Carole Corbeil, Arcand's thesis was simple: Trudeau's federalists succeeded because they appealed to the "complacent greed" of the "recently fattened working class", adding that Arcand makes the "OUI forces look extremely naive" and Trudeau look "like the Prince himself, astute beyond his intentions" (Corbeil, 1982). William Johnson agreed noting that René Lévesque lacked the military might to successfully found a Québec nation; "The film's imagery strongly implies that René Lévesque, despite his illusions, cannot win, and Pierre Trudeau cannot lose, because Trudeau commands the army" (Johnson, 1982). As such, the documentary offers a paradoxical take on the referendum; it disavows the fear mongering tactics of the federal forces, while simultaneously showing contempt for Lévesque's unwillingness to undertake similar measures in order to found the state. To make this point, Arcand juxtaposes footage of Lévesque denouncing the federal government's immoral campaign tactics with Machiavelli's insistence that great men are only shamed by defeat and never by their tactics.

Lévesque was wary of the extremist wing of the party, but his successive defeats by the Trudeau-led federalists placed him in the position of a ruler who increasingly relied upon the weapons of others to put him in power. This became evident when Jacques Rose got a standing ovation at the 1981 PQ convention (Fraser & Owen, 2003: p. 311). Lévesque was disgusted; he had lost control of his party and was forced to come out against the radical resolutions that had emerged from his own party's convention (Fraser & Owen, 2003: pp. 311-312). From at least 1966 a long term FLQ strategy of robbery, bombings and kidnappings had existed, which was intended to culminate in a broad-based insurrection and revolution. It was outlined in a secret document entitled *Revolutionary Strategy and the Role of the Avant-Garde* (Tetley, 2007: p. 21). It may well have been that Trudeau's sublime response to the October Crisis precluded such an option had Lévesque even been capable of demanding it. Whatever the reason, Machiavelli's maxim that "all armed prophets conquered and the unarmed ones were ruined" held up in Lévesque's case (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 24). As with Savonarola "he was ruined in his new orders as soon as the multitude began not to believe in them, and he had no mode for holding firm those who had believed, nor for making unbelievers believe" (ibid). The latter part of the quotation reflects the travails of the *Parti Québécois* going forward although it is hard to see how such extreme advice could be enacted in a democratic context. There were numerous examples of separatist movements who fought for their freedom at the time and an inverse number of examples of liberty freely bestowed. Given that Lévesque had such a high regard

for the conciliatory approach to separation it was remarkable that his generous political spirit remains unrecognized by his detractors outside of the province.

Lévesque had presciently argued that Québec would be judged on how it treated its minorities (Brittain, 1986). To this effect he successfully fought against a group in his party that advocated a uni-lingual French state, arguing that the English were a legitimate minority in Québec (Fraser & Owen, 2003: p. 47). Based on Machiavellian precepts, Lévesque's decision to make himself a defender of the lesser forces was shrewd. However, he was not astute enough to sufficiently weaken the powerful factions in his own party who spoke of ethnic purity and of the dangers of cultural contamination for Québec. In the end, "the arms of others either fall off your back, or weigh you down or hold you tight" (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 56). The FLQ, one facet of the extreme wing of the PQ, declared that "of course, we mean something more than René Lévesque's paper independence, which is supported by the parasitic petit bourgeois of Quebec who only want to replace the English interests with those of American imperialism. For us independence is inseparable from the realization of collective self-determination by the masses..." (Gazette, 1970: p. 31). The linguistic purists remain a thorn in the side of the party and they are dangerous because their loyalty is inimical to a process of gradualism under a leader. They are united behind an unachievably pure ideology: "For with these ruin is accomplished: they are all united, all resolved to obey someone else" (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 55). In order to placate them Lévesque was forced to go back on his word and ram Bill 101 through the legislature, making French the only official language in Québec (Fraser & Owen, 2003: p. 110). Education in French became compulsory for immigrants and even those from other Canadian provinces. Pushed by mounting pressure from his language obsessed followers it was now Lévesque's turn to suppress individual freedoms for the good of the state. Labelled as "majority rule with a vengeance", the bill caused resentment among linguistic minorities but the French majority, reflecting the heightened excitement of the times, largely approved of the law. Bill 101, much like the Union Act before it, represented a legal linguistic fortress aimed at ensuring social cohesion (Fraser & Owen, 2003: p. 111). For Machiavelli fortresses were a *pharmakon*; value neutral in themselves, but potentially beneficial or harmful depending on the conditions of use allied to the hoped for outcome (Derrida, 1981). "Fortresses are thus useful or not according to the times, and if they do well for you in one regard, they hurt you in another" (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 86). Intriguingly for the fortunes of past and future PQ leaders, Machiavelli's conclusion was that if a prince does build a fortress he should probably do so only if he fears the people more than foreigners (Machiavelli, 1998: pp. 86-87). The problem was that fortresses made rulers more audacious and more violent towards their subjects, which in turn led to public hatred (Machiavelli, 1996: p. 185), which he should avoid at all cost if he wishes to find no dangers in his other "infamies" (Machiavelli, 1998: pp. 71-72). Machiavelli warns that a republic that fears its own citizens has only itself to blame for the anger of the public (Machiavelli, 1996: p. 185). Fortresses, legal or actual, offer a false sense of security and to make his point Machiavelli describes Ottaviano Fregoso, who demolished a Genoan fortress after he captured it. "Being very prudent he knew that not fortresses but the will of men maintains princes in their states" (Machiavelli, 1996: p. 187).

In a scathing attack on the tendency of political actors to distort the triumphs and sufferings of history, Machiavelli warns that while the present is blamed on a regular basis, the past is unduly praised by people: "the truth of ancient things is not altogether understood and that most often the things that would bring infamy to those times are concealed" (Machiavelli, 1996: p. 123). He points out that in war writers praise the fortune of the winner. The actions of the victors are said to be rendered very expansive, and to make the victory glorious, the acts of adversaries are also rendered brilliant (Machiavelli, 1996: p. 123). In their final battle, Trudeau's repatriation of the constitution in the face of Lévesque's opposition was frequently recorded as a victory for the former; whereas in truth it was a mutual defeat.

### 3.2. The Repatriation of the Constitution

*"As soon as the external wars have ceased the internal commence"*

(Machiavelli, 1990: p. 1250)

Six months after his forced retirement, *fortuna* would offer Trudeau the opportunity to leave the shadows and resume power, since the looming Québec referendum once more rallied English Canada back to Trudeau's side. The referendum did not pass and with Lévesque's energy sapped by the process Trudeau was now more determined than ever to unite the country through the repatriation of the Constitution (McWhinney, 1984: pp. 242-243). The 1980-1981 battle between Lévesque and Trudeau came to a head in Ottawa during the "one last time" conference. In what many considered to have been a Machiavellian move, Trudeau convinced Lévesque to agree

in principle to the idea of a referendum on the sensitive issues of the Charter of Right and Freedoms (Brittain, 1986); however, the idea of another referendum did not sit well with the other premiers. Trudeau convinced them that Lévesque could not be trusted and he was then able to reach a constitutional agreement with all of the provinces except Québec (Fraser & Owen, 2003: pp. 294-297). Although Lévesque refused to sign the accord, he had already gambled away his right of veto and put his fate in the hands of Canada's other prime ministers (Fraser & Owen, 2003: p. 302); once again his trust in the civility of others betrayed him and proved his lack of *virtù*.

In *Le confort et l'indifférence*, actor Jean-Pierre Ronfart, remarks that for a prince “nothing is more difficult to handle, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage” than to make changes in a state's constitution (Arcand, 1982). Those ominous words were also found at the conclusion of a secret memorandum outlining the Trudeau administration's strategy for the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution (LaSelva, 1996: p. 83). Michael Kirby, Trudeau's Secretary to the Cabinet for Federal-Provincial Relations, included the quote in a document intended for “Ministers' Eyes Only” (Milne, 1982: p. 219). Since Leo Strauss' students have gone on to generate a significant reputation for Machiavellian politics on what some might consider minimal documentary evidence, it is startling to recognize the degree to which Kirby *et al.* have so far escaped their scrutiny. Milne is not alone in assuming that the Machiavellian tag demonstrates that the authors of the Kirby memorandum considered themselves to be conscious students of the Florentine philosopher (Milne, 1982: p. 234). The orthodox view among pundits is that the Machiavellian backroom politics involved in the process were not an aberration but rather characteristic of the Prime Minister's former “gunslinger” style. The Kirby memorandum reinforces this notion and provides suggestive evidence to re-consider the level of influence that Machiavelli's writings actually had on the Trudeau administration.

Trudeau was immediately hailed the “winner” for getting a constitutional accord although he failed according to his own goal of uniting Québec and the rest of Canada. Québec felt deeply humiliated by Trudeau's approach to politics and the manner in which the country's new multicultural identity denied French Canadians their history and identity as a separate nation (Paquin, 2001: pp. 180). Ironically Trudeau's efforts only ensured that the Québécois' self-identification with the province became stronger than ever (Paquin, 2001: pp. 180-181). The subsequent referendum would prove significantly closer than the last, although a “tired and emotional” Jacques Parizeau showed his ignorance of Machiavellian analysis by blaming “money and the ethnic vote” for the loss (CBC, 1995). Machiavelli recognized that people often blamed money for their failures, especially in war, noting that: “This sentence [money is the sinew of war] is cited every day and is followed by princes who are not prudent enough” (Machiavelli, 1996: p. 148).

LaSelva frames the repatriation of the Constitution as Trudeau's attempt at solving a complex problem of statecraft that had already been explicitly articulated by Machiavelli in the *Florentine Histories*: “how can a people who are divided among themselves attain unity and greatness?” (LaSelva, 1996: p. 83) The Charter of Rights and Freedoms that was included within the Canadian Constitution was Trudeau's attempt at declaring Canadians a sovereign people. Consequently, LaSelva argues that the Charter was “Trudeau's political counter to decentralizing provincialists and Québécois separatists” (LaSelva, 1996: p. 96). By reaffirming the will of Canadians to live together under a constitution, Trudeau was challenging the notion that it was the will of Canadians to live apart (LaSelva, 1996: p. 97). The concept of a “Just Society” was Trudeau's answer to Machiavelli's great quandary, which was how to end the destructive power of factionalism in the state? (LaSelva, 1996: p. 98) The problem was how to give every social class in the community a voice? Machiavelli's solution, which was profoundly radical in his day, was most succinctly outlined in his memo, *A Discourse on Remodelling the City of Florence*; it was for everyone to have a stake in the republic.

We cannot call that republic well-established in which things are done according to the will of one man yet are decided with the approval of many; nor can we believe a republic fitted to last, in which there is no content for those elements that must be contented if republics are not to fall... Those who organize a republic ought to provide for the three different sorts of men who exist in all cities, namely, the most important, those in the middle, and the lowest (Gilbert, 1965: p. 101).

The Just Society committed the government to “providing equal opportunities for all Canadians and to the distribution of wealth between provinces” (LaSelva, 1996: p. 86). The pursuit of a Just Society through a Charter of Rights was intended to ensure that these opportunities would favor individuals, rather than classes or cultural groups. It treated individuals as equals, afforded inalienable rights, and, according to LaSelva, turned Canada into a “nation of minorities” (LaSelva, 1996: p. 97). Beyond the focus on individual rather than group rights, the



essential difference in renaissance versus modern conceptions of a just society is that the older version only promised an opportunity to share in the potential glory of the state as it expanded; the modern version essentially redistributed wealth rather than glory and it was this feature that led Barry Cooper to suggest that increasing the dependency of minorities on the federal government revealed Trudeau's true Machiavellian greatness: "By fighting for the disadvantaged, he ensured they would never fight for themselves; by speaking for the voiceless, he ensured they had nothing to say" (Cooper, 2000). Cooper is misled into thinking that such an outcome was Machiavellian but it was Medician, in that, just as with the Liberal party in the twentieth century, the extraordinary good fortune of the Medici patriarchs was based on their ability to present the politically correct face to the prevailing political circumstances. And although many things have changed since the renaissance; neither man nor woman should make the error of thinking that heaven, sun, elements, people have varied so much in motion, order, and power from what they were in antiquity that learning from them is no longer possible (Machiavelli, 1996: p. 6).

#### 4. Conclusion

In the *Discourses on Livy*, republics and kingdoms are all deemed to have an innate goodness that is eroded by time: "Because in the process of time that goodness is corrupted, unless something intervenes to lead it back to the mark, it of necessity kills that body" (Machiavelli, 1996: p. 205). Given that men always praise ancient times, but not always reasonably it is in the interest of the common good that we declare that, although they embodied some of Machiavelli's core principles, two of Quebec's greatest historical figures, Trudeau and Lévesque, ultimately weakened the state via their conflict. In the end, both men failed in their endeavours to unite or divide and they were both stained with like errors (Machiavelli, 1996: p. 277). If the words we have used to characterize these men of great industry appear harsh, they will surely be softened by the context in which they operated. Although Prime Ministers are given powers that go far beyond those accorded to most citizens; contemporary politicians rarely, if ever, reach the glorious heights of the semi-divine or the depravity of the semi-beastial suggested by Machiavelli (King, 2008: pp. 288-289; Machiavelli, 1998: p. 69). Prime Ministers generally allow themselves to be bound by the laws of the *patria* and when disorder arises they must restrain themselves from using certain simple and effective remedies for fear of appearing cruel and thus losing electoral support. The relative peacefulness of our times does not alter the fact that a Prime Minister must remain industrious in his efforts to color his nature, and be even more concerned to hide the fact that he can dissemble whenever harsh remedies are necessary to maintain the state free and prosperous (Machiavelli, 1996: p. 70).

Having assessed through a Machiavellian lens the many mistakes made in Québec in the 1970's and early 1980's we will conclude by using the same lens to consider the future of Canadian unity in the face of Quebecers' continuing taste for independence. In so doing, we hope to highlight some of the anachronisms inherent in the application of renaissance tropes to contemporary issues and suggest that, at least in the large urban centres if not the rural villages, the taste for extreme measures has passed. Today, because of the media, leaders are more vulnerable than ever to accusations; they are constantly seen by millions and touched by very few (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 71). Furthermore, given the democratic context within which the Canadian state operates, we might imagine that now more than ever, a Prime Minister needs to appear merciful, faithful and humane (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 70). Recognizing that this is not always possible means that Prime Ministers and Premiers need to be more like a fox who can recognize snares than a lion who can frighten the wolves (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 78). A renaissance ruler would not have given undue importance to nationalist feelings about the dignity of Québec sovereignty or to the federalist ideals of what a united Canada should be. The unity of Canada would have been thought of as important only to the extent that division makes the country militarily weak (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 58).

A politically sublime Prime Minister might unite the country; however, the effect would only be temporary as long as the province holds on to its axiomatic distinctiveness; indeed sublime exogenous events, such as war and state terrorism have generally had the opposite effect on Quebecers. The premier of Quebec's power continues to rest on the very divisions that haunt the imagination of Ottawa. However, rather than the clean break promised by the bellicose *virtù* of Machiavelli or the *virtue of* sovereignty association favored by René Lévesque, Québec is currently barricaded inside a linguistic fortress its leaders are neither fully in charge of nor trust to withstand the threats at hand. Fear of exogenous assimilation is matched by a rising fear of endogenous cultural mongrelism, a fear that was only exacerbated by the PQ's latest venture into a charter of Quebec values. To ward off assimilation, Quebec made numerous proposals to purify the public service by denying access to public

office to non-French speaking citizens or those that display prominent religious symbols that threaten the *sang froid* of its rural population. The manner by which provincial accommodation rights for religious minorities have been attacked by Québec politicians has drawn the attention of the world's media (BBC, 2007; BBC, 2013). As distressing as these incidents are for the rest of Canada they remain true to a Machiavellian logic that eluded the decent soul of René Lévesque and were duly noted in Arcand's film (Corbeil, 1982). Machiavelli believed that security in a newly acquired state came from trusting in the people enough to make them armed citizens and not disarmed subjects (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 83). Given the experience with the FLQ it is not our intention to suggest that premiers of Quebec take this advice literally, however, for all of the soul searching that the charter of values of Hérouxville or the provincial version caused the province, it would, according to Machiavelli, be extremely dangerous for Quebec City to dismiss the fears that informed such a declaration. As Alain Dubuc insightfully noted in his *La Presse* column "Hérouxville was angered by the tolerance of Montrealers, by their passivity towards the changes brought out by immigration, by their multi-ethnic culture, their rejection of religion, their 'gay village' and their arrogant elites. For small towns such as Hérouxville, the real threat to their identity has little to do with veil-clad Muslim women, it is the urban world that is gradually drifting away from the traditional model" (Dubuc, 2007). Given their traditional strength in the small towns, the PQ leadership can perhaps be forgiven for amplifying the rhetoric of the rural population, as those traditionalists seem to be the last true believers in the separatist message. After all, what makes a leader contemptible in the eyes of his supporters "is to be held variable, light, effeminate, pusillanimous, irresolute" (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 72). If, on the other hand, the majority of Quebecers find that pill too bitter to swallow, then the party's focus would be better directed towards the material security promised by Lévesque's more pragmatic vision. Machiavelli, ironically saw value in both approaches. The safest route is for a leader to "inspire his citizens to follow their pursuits quietly, in trade and in agriculture and in every other pursuit of men, so that one person does not fear to adorn his possessions for fear that they be taken away from him, and another to open up a trade for fear of taxes" (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 91). However, the prize for the premier that successfully leads the province to full independence would be exponentially greater; nothing less than the apotheosis of the leader. I cannot express with what love he would be received in all those provinces that have suffered from these floods from outside; with what thirst for revenge, with what obstinate faith, with what piety, with what tears. What doors would be closed to him? What peoples would deny him obedience? What envy would oppose him? (Machiavelli, 1998: p. 105)

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