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# The Reluctant Urbanist: Pierre Trudeau and the Creation of the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs

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Résumé de l'article

En 1971, le ministère d'État Affaires urbaines a débuté ses activités au Canada. La création du ministère était sans précédent et a permis d'apporter une aide précieuse aux municipalités canadiennes. Mais l'un des principaux obstacles à la création du ministère était la résistance du premier ministre Pierre Trudeau à l'idée que le gouvernement fédéral prenne un engagement formel à l'égard des villes du Canada. Trudeau a finalement cédé et créé le ministère, abandonnant à la fois sa résistance à ce type d'engagement et sa conception traditionnelle du fédéralisme. Cet article retrace les influences sur les décisions prises par Pierre Trudeau, en tentant d'expliquer cette marche arrière, tout en décrivant de façon détaillée son attitude à l'endroit du fédéralisme au Canada.

*The Reluctant Urbanist:  
Pierre Trudeau and the Creation of the  
Ministry of State for Urban Affairs*

**Abstract**

*In 1971 the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs began operations in Canada. The creation of the ministry was unprecedented and resulted in invaluable assistance to Canada's municipalities. One of the major obstacles to the ministry's creation, however, was Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's resistance to the idea of formal engagement with Canada's cities. Trudeau would eventually relent and create the ministry, abandoning both his resistance to federal–urban engagement and his traditional conceptualization of federalism. This paper tracks the influences on Trudeau's decision-making process, attempting to explain this policy reversal, while also detailing the change of attitude of Pierre Trudeau towards federalism in Canada.*

**Résumé**

*En 1971, le ministère d'État Affaires urbaines a débuté ses activités au Canada. La création du ministère était sans précédent et a permis d'apporter une aide précieuse aux municipalités canadiennes. Mais l'un des principaux obstacles à la création du ministère était la résistance du premier ministre Pierre Trudeau à l'idée que le gouvernement fédéral prenne un engagement formel à l'égard des villes du Canada. Trudeau a finalement cédé et créé le ministère, abandonnant à la fois sa résistance à ce type d'engagement et sa conception traditionnelle du fédéralisme. Cet article retrace les influences sur les décisions prises par Pierre Trudeau, en tentant d'expliquer cette marche arrière, tout en décrivant de façon détaillée son attitude à l'endroit du fédéralisme au Canada.*

**Introduction**

The Ministry of State for Urban Affairs (MSUA) marked a turning point in federal–municipal relations in Canada. Before the initiation of MSUA, municipalities relied primarily upon their respective provincial governments for assistance. This relationship came into question in the 1960s. Scores of urban activists and urban policy advocates called for a change in this dynamic and demanded that the federal government become more involved in the urban sphere. These policy advocates called upon the federal government to assist local governments, insisting that the health of Canada's municipalities was of national importance.

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau initially ignored these demands, believing that municipal and urban affairs were strictly a provincial domain. He did not

want to intrude on provincial jurisdiction. At this time, Trudeau's view of federalism was simple: the constitution explicitly stated which policy areas were provincial and which were federal and any deviation from this structure would cause discord within the federation. This vision would eventually be contested, however, as critics began to form within Trudeau's caucus, attacking his position on urban affairs. Soon after, Trudeau's political rivals began to capitalize on his inaction. Trudeau eventually changed his position and began to fund and coordinate federal–urban policy by creating the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs. To reach this position, however, Trudeau not only had to change his position on federal–urban engagement but also acknowledge that there were flaws with his initial conceptualization of Canadian federalism.

Even to this day, Pierre Trudeau's shadow continues to loom larger over Canadian politics. His impact on the political life of the country is undeniable, but his influence on how Canadians view the federation and federalism is, perhaps, one of his most enduring legacies. Trudeau's views on federalism were altered during the course of his tenure as Prime Minister and he was drawn from viewing the federation as being limited by provincial jurisdiction to one where the federal government had a national interest in areas that transcended its own jurisdiction.

This paper helps to shed light on this shift. The creation of MSUA was a departure point for Trudeau, and through this particular case study, we can begin to map Trudeau's changing views of federalism. The paper has several components. In the first section, Trudeau's early views on federalism are examined. Second, the state of municipal–provincial–federal relations in the 1960s is briefly discussed. The following section examines the pressure that Trudeau felt—both internally and externally—to create a formal urban ministry, along with some insight into his decision-making. The final section concludes the study.

### **Pierre Trudeau's Federalism**

Before becoming Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau wrote widely on federalism and nationalism. His early writings indicate that he favoured a balance between the compartmentalization that embodied Canadian federalism for so long and co-operation. This made for a cautious approach to Canadian federalism, one that would find a place in Trudeau's early years as Prime Minister. Over time, however, Trudeau's vision of the Canadian federation evolved into one where the federal government captured more policy and resource space. This section dives into some of Trudeau's earlier writings, attempting to provide an overview of how he envisioned the Canadian federation before coming to government.

To Trudeau, the essential function of federalism was the protection of individual liberty. A strengthened state could trump the minority, as Trudeau makes clear in *Federalism and the French Canadians*. Two levels of

autonomous government allows for not only the protection of individuals, but also the protection of culture. In the case of Quebec, Trudeau argues that federalism helps to protect minority linguistic rights within Canada, while also protecting minority linguistic rights within Quebec itself. Trudeau argues that, “the federal system obliges Quebec’s political culture to stand the test of competition at the federal level, while allowing Quebec to choose the form of government best suited to its needs at the provincial level” (33). As such, the jurisdictional separation strengthens both levels. Trudeau continues by arguing that, “I believe in provincial autonomy... I think it was important for French Canadians to have a place of their own in which to learn the art of democratic and responsible government” (33).

Trudeau’s experience as a French Canadian informed his views. As did his time as a political activist in Quebec. He recognized the need to respect provincial jurisdiction while still looking to the federal government for basic protections. In making the federation, Trudeau argues that two forces needed to be addressed, namely the linguistic and cultural differences between French and English and the attraction of regionalisms (“Federalism, Nationalism” 198). Federalism in Canada was a pragmatic step towards uniting a vast country comprised of often-competing linguistic and cultural groups. Therefore, federalism was a necessity to protect the minority against majority rule.

How should this relationship work in practice? Trudeau responds by addressing the need for compromise. In a 1964 paper presented to the Canadian Political Science Association, Trudeau argued that federalism, at its core, is about co-operation. To Trudeau, in a federation “the exercise of sovereignty is divided between a central government and regional ones” (“Federalism, Nationalism” 192). He continues by describing federalism as both a compromise and a pact. A compromise in that when national consensus on all things is not desirable or cannot be readily obtained, the area of consensus is reduced in order that consensus on some things can be reached (“Federalism, Nationalism” 192). It is a pact, in that compromise cannot be changed unilaterally (192).

While compromise is a necessity in Canadian federalism, Trudeau also argues that this is not a fluid process. He argues that there are pacts in place that create mutually exclusive areas of jurisdiction. This is what can be described as compartmentalization—each level of government operating within its own jurisdiction. This view was summarized by John Saywell in his introduction to Trudeau’s book, *Federalism and the French Canadians*:

Trudeau’s federal state is one where each level of government operates within its own jurisdiction, where the power to tax and spend is not used to justify legislative encroachment of initiative in other jurisdictions, where equalization and stabilization are accepted as equitable and necessary constituents of a highly regionalized federal state, and

where federal–provincial consultation is maximized, even on matters exclusively within federal jurisdiction. (xii)

Trudeau's early views on federalism are clear: he envisioned a county with a clear division of autonomy and policy responsibility. He believed this was essential for the protection of the individual and that deviation from this model could lead to disharmony within the federation. Over time, Trudeau would begin to ease some of these long-held beliefs about the federation.

### **Federal–Urban Relations in the 1960s**

During the 1950s, the provincial governments assumed responsibility for more services from their local governments and also reduced the fiscal power of municipalities due to this decreased service load (Sancton 312). Sancton notes that because of the increased role of the provinces, the federal government was left “virtually impotent” as a policy maker (312). This centralization occurred in three successive waves. During the depression, provincial governments assumed more municipal debt because of bankruptcies and, as such, assumed many municipal sources of income (Tindal and Tindal 181). During the Second World War, further centralization occurred due to the war effort and, as a result, municipalities were left with only property taxes as a source of income (Tindal and Tindal 181). The postwar period led to further centralization with the provinces becoming more involved with municipal policy in an effort to address the needs of returning soldiers (Tindal and Tindal 181).

This was the situation of municipalities in the 1960s. Cities had fewer sources of income and fewer policy areas in which they had sole direction. Provincial governments increased their power in the areas of policy and finances, leaving municipalities almost entirely dependent upon provincial direction. In the municipal–provincial relationship, the provinces held control. Constitutionally, municipalities are under the policy directive of the provinces and with more autonomy stripped from municipalities during the Depression and war years Canada's cities were dependent upon senior levels of government for the resources necessary to run their municipalities. While the provinces had reduced the taxing power and policy responsibility of their municipalities, the provinces were themselves largely dependent on the federal government for resources. This scenario opened the door for more involvement from the federal government.

Beginning in the 1960s, a wave of urban activism and policy advocacy began and Canada soon experienced what some have called the “politicization of urban life” (Tindal and Tindal 307). New urban residents began to collaborate with groups such as environmentalists, gays and lesbians, feminists, and peace advocates opposing local “urban renewal” projects in Canada's big cities (Tindal and Tindal 307).

Urban activism soon became a staple in most large Canadian cities. For example, in Vancouver, the Strathcona Property Owners' and Tenants' Association (SPOTA) was created to oppose the City of Vancouver's development plans (Tindal and Tindal 307). In Montreal, residents' associations and protest groups formed to oppose the development projects of Mayor Jean Drapeau, decrying him for not providing enough affordable housing and for not halting construction on high-rise developments (Tindal and Tindal 309). The sheer amount of urban activist groups that sprung up in Toronto led to the creation of the Confederation of Residents and Ratepayers Associations (CORRA) in 1968 to help coordinate the large number of groups in the city agitating for change (Magnusson 115).

These activists triggered a response from municipal politicians and civic leaders began to request increased assistance from senior levels of government to fund the inadequacies of urban life identified by urban activists. Urban activists and policy advocates argued that housing, transportation, and the general liveability of cities needed to be improved. They found a receptive audience with local city councils and municipal associations, such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, who aggregated these interests and lobbied the federal government for increased resources.

These concerns were growing, but little changed. The provinces still held responsibility for municipalities and, as noted above, in urban affairs, provincial governments were jurisdictionally rich but resource poor. As such, the attention of urban policy advocates shifted to the federal government. The response from Trudeau was muted though. Trudeau still very much believed in the validity of a compartmentalized conceptualization of Canadian federalism—one in which overstepping the provinces to fund municipal projects was not an option.

### **Pressure From Within Caucus**

Pierre Trudeau's response to this new wave of urban activism was questioned from both inside and outside his government. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Trudeau's stance on municipal–provincial–federal relations would lead to criticisms from his caucus members and even defections, adding a political imperative to Trudeau's decision to fund municipal projects.

One of Trudeau's earliest critics was Paul Hellyer, who believed passionately that issues such as housing and transportation were vital to the health of the nation. As Minister of Transportation, Hellyer was appointed to lead a housing task force and was mandated to travel the country, meeting with relevant stakeholders in order to create coherent, national housing policies. When his recommendations were released, Hellyer felt they were disregarded by Trudeau and he resigned from cabinet to sit as a backbench member of the Liberal caucus shortly afterwards. Hellyer argued that people who were in need of housing were unconcerned about what level of government provided them

with assistance and that the federal government, as the level of government with the most resources, should do what it could to provide housing to those in need (Seale "A Constitution").

Hellyer stated that the government's opposition to a stand-alone ministry responsible for housing and urban issues was, "illogical, if not inconceivable, that the Government of Canada could have ministries dealing with fisheries, forestry, veterans affairs, and other matters which involve a minority of the population, but none to deal on a full-time basis with the urban problems which involve more than seventy per cent of the population, not to mention housing which involves virtually everyone" (Cullingworth 34).

In making his case for increased resources for housing, Hellyer not only challenged Trudeau's view of housing and urban policy but also his view of Canadian federalism. "We're talking about a theory of federalism which is not what many people think it is—a theory of envisaging a strong federal government capable of accepting its responsibility for full employment, coping with inflation and assisting the provinces in other areas," stated Hellyer in summing up what he believed Trudeau's vision of Canadian federalism was, "but more a theory of 10 essentially autonomous provinces held together by the string of a fairly weak federal government" (Seale "A Constitution"). Hellyer made it clear that he believed that Trudeau, and his perception of Canadian federalism was too theoretical and unfit for the realities of governing such a diverse country.

"I believe that the Prime Minister and others have uppermost in their minds the unity of the country, but on a basis which will make all the provinces equal," Hellyer continued in his resignation press conference, "now, the practical application of this, of course, is what kind of a solution is possible which will make all provinces equal and will that solution, if it provides the big provinces with enough powers to satisfy them work? I have some very serious reservations that it will... this is my concern" (Seale "A Constitution"). The problem with this brand of federalism, stated Hellyer, was that it was out of touch with the governing realities of 1968 Canada. "I can't personally accept a theory of federalism which, however attractive it is in principle, is not viable from the standpoint of meeting the needs of a highly industrialized society and meeting the real problems created by the technological revolution," stated Hellyer (Seale "A Constitution"). Trudeauian federalism, according to Hellyer, was outdated, impractical and in need of revision.

The differences in vision between Hellyer and Trudeau were all the more evident when viewing Hellyer's resignation letter and Trudeau's response. Hellyer explained that he was resigning from cabinet because he felt there was "a lack of initiative in using federal powers to deal with issues such as housing, pollution, inflation and urban development, which are so vital to the



needs of ordinary people in our modern industrialized society... given these circumstances and after the most thoughtful consideration on my part, I feel I have no alternative but to resign from the cabinet” (“Hellyer’s Letter”). While cordial in his response, Trudeau challenged Hellyer’s assertions, “the government believes in an active role of leadership in the field of housing and urban living... our government also believes that real leadership consists in getting all levels of government to work together for the benefit of all Canadians” (“Hellyer’s Letter”). Trudeau also reminded Hellyer that the first job of a Prime Minister was to keep the “country united” (“Hellyer’s Letter”).

Trudeau’s mantra was co-operation, where Hellyer was more interested in unilateral policy action, making the division between both visions of the federation clearer. Trudeau was more cautious than Hellyer, believing that any disturbance in the traditional lines of jurisdiction would inevitably result in conflict and could threaten the unity of the country. For Trudeau, the risks were too high and co-operation between both levels of government should, and would, be sought. Hellyer believed the opposite. Good public policy would unite Canadians, Hellyer believed, and the federal government had a responsibility to provide good public policy to those in need. Their divergent views were not reconcilable and resulted in Hellyer’s departure.

Hellyer was not Trudeau’s only critic though. Philip Givens, the former Mayor of Toronto and Liberal Member of Parliament for York West, also began to criticize Trudeau’s handling of urban issues and his rigid view of Canadian federalism shortly after Hellyer left cabinet. Givens stated in 1970, at a trade conference in Toronto, that the Trudeau government was neglecting cities and the federal government needed to make a sustained commitment to improving Canada’s urban centres (“Seals and Wheat”). The problem, said Givens, was that cities were not recognized by the government and noted that provincial premiers, such as Alex Campbell of Prince Edward Island who represented 100,000 people was given more respect in Ottawa than the Chair of Metro Toronto, Ab Campbell, who represented over two million people (“Seals and Wheat”).

To Givens, the solution was to create a national council on urban affairs that would advise the government on urban policy. This, said Givens, would allow the federal government to “put the body on the table and find the cure for its ills” (“Seals and Wheat”). The problem with this concept, Givens stated, was that the senior cabinet ministers, civil servants and a host of academics who advised Trudeau’s government found three objections about engaging cities: 1) there was no money for cities; 2) constitutionally, cities were under provincial jurisdiction; and 3) the mere discussion of assistance to cities would raise expectations about government action, which could not be fulfilled (“Seals and Wheat”).



Givens' attacks against the government were equally as pointed in the House of Commons, as he derided the Trudeau government for spending an inordinate amount of time discussing rural issues. "We seem to spend 90 per cent of our time discussing wet wheat, fish and the Newfie Bullet," said Givens to his fellow parliamentarians who applauded his comments (Newman "Applause"). Givens continued by stating that 80 percent of Canadians live in urban centres. As such, it would only make sense to devote 50 percent of the debate in the House of Commons to urban issues (Newman "Applause"). Givens reiterated the story that initially got him involved in federal politics and interested in Trudeau's party: during the 1968 election, Pierre Trudeau visited Toronto and spoke to a crowd of over 100,000, describing cities as "dynamic centres of creativity, learning and culture," leading Givens to believe that "he had found a kindred spirit" ("Seals and Wheat"). Givens' expectations went unfulfilled and, over time, he became increasingly irate about the direction of the Trudeau government on urban issues.

Dissatisfied with the response from within the Liberal caucus and cabinet, Givens took his case directly to the Liberal membership. During the 1970 Liberal Party national policy convention, Givens introduced a motion that would see the government include municipalities in constitutional negotiations and future constitutional conventions. Givens' motion would eventually pass, but on the floor of the convention, he made a passionate case for the increased influence of municipalities in constitutional talks:

At the time of confederation, municipalities were small and insignificant. Now some cities have populations larger than seven of the provinces. Some cities have budgets larger than seven of the provinces. It's time these areas were plugged into the constitution. Whether we do it by direct constitutional change or some other way is beside the point. (Newman "Liberals Favor")

While Givens may have launched the first attack within government, Lloyd Axworthy, the former assistant to Paul Hellyer, and director of urban affairs studies at the University of Winnipeg, followed his line of attack. Axworthy commented to the *Globe and Mail* that Prime Minister Trudeau should create a national urban policy, stating that "urban issues are much too vital to the national well being of the country not to have the government involved" (Crane "Involvement"). Axworthy continued by stating that the federal government "cannot abdicate responsibility for problems that have such a crucial bearing on the economic vitality and social progress of Canada" (Crane "Involvement").

Axworthy responded to Trudeau's assertions that the jurisdictional barriers present within the federation limited the federal government's ability to act in the urban sphere by stating that "there is no barrier... the federal government already has the authority, but just does not use it very wisely" (Crane

“Involvement”). To Axworthy, the barriers to entering the municipal policy sphere were purely political: “let us not make Quebec mad, or more mad than she is now, nor raise the ire of other provinces” (Crane “Involvement”). To Axworthy, Trudeau’s calculations were simple: he did not want to anger the provinces, which retained constitutional authority for municipalities. Trudeau was being cautious in his approach with the provinces, but to Axworthy, this caution was resulting in bad public policy.

Ontario Liberal Party leader Robert Nixon added to Axworthy’s argument. “The federal government has definitely not shown enough initiative in urban affairs,” said Nixon, “its attitude toward the constitution does not keep up with the times” (Carriere). Nixon reiterated his claim later that year, stating that the federal government should “bypass” the provinces and help cities directly (Newman “Aid Cities”). To Nixon, the federal government should be making “direct, unconditional grants,” to Canadian municipalities. Nixon summed up his position: “the federal government could decide to make grants available for pollution control and the decision of priorities for spending that money on air pollution, water pollution or sewage construction should be made by the local government of the municipality affected” (Newman “Aid Cities”). Nixon acknowledged that there were constitutional barriers to the federal government financially assisting municipalities, but insisted that federal involvement was the only way that “municipalities [could] meet the problems which now face them” (Newman “Aid Cities”).

Nixon’s criticism of the Trudeau government found resonance with Phillip Givens, who resigned from the House of Commons in 1971 to run for Nixon’s Ontario Liberals in the riding of York-Forest Hill (Munro). The normally outspoken Givens was reserved as he announced his retirement from federal politics, stating only that he had a larger interest in provincial affairs: “my most vital interest has been, and continues to be, in urban affairs, housing and problems of the environment... I now feel I can render more valuable service in these fields at the provincial level” (Munro).

Givens was not the only member to leave the Trudeau government due to its handling of urban issues. Perry Ryan, the Liberal Member of Parliament for Spadina, defected to the Progressive Conservative caucus citing the Trudeau government’s handling of urban issues as one of his main reasons for abandoning his party. Ryan accused Trudeau of “shameful neglect of Toronto and its problems,” and continued by stating, “I hope... that Toronto will finally have somebody to speak up for it in Parliament” (Newman “Ryan to Sit”).

Pierre Trudeau’s reluctance to engage Canada’s urban centres began to cost him politically. During the late 1960s, Paul Hellyer, a key member of Trudeau’s cabinet, stepped down because of the opposition he encountered to the recommendations of the Housing Task Force. Hellyer openly challenged

Trudeau's vision of federalism and triggered more dissent within the Liberal caucus. Philip Givens, a former Mayor of Toronto, began openly criticizing Trudeau's inaction in the urban sphere and eventually resigned, opting instead to run for Robert Nixon and his Ontario Liberals. Nixon, Givens explained, was more open to the urban reforms he wanted to see. Perry Ryan, another Trudeau backbencher and critic, crossed the floor, joining the Progressive Conservatives, stating that Trudeau was ignoring Toronto.

Trudeau was under a significant amount of internal pressure to reverse his abiding beliefs in a municipal–provincial–federal policy relationship. His caucus, no longer content to voice their opinions in private, was making their views well known publically. Trudeau's caucus and his supporters were beginning to criticize his approach to urban issues. This, however, was not enough to change his position. There were inherent political disadvantages that Trudeau must have recognized, but he finally decided to adopt an urban strategy when the opposition Progressive Conservative party began to make serious proposals to reform the relationship between the federal government and Canada's municipalities.

### **Pressure From the Opposition**

After losing three key members of his caucus and encountering opposition from inside his party, Trudeau must have begun to recognize that there were both political threats and opportunities to engaging cities. In 1970 *Globe and Mail* journalist Geoffrey Stevens noted that "urban affairs poses a problem for the Liberals who must make political inroads in Ontario's cities before the next election" (Stevens). Progressive Conservative opposition leader Robert Stanfield began dining with big city mayors across the country to get their support and listen to their concerns ("Stanfield Plays"). Stanfield, who dined with Etobicoke mayor Edward Horton, Scarborough mayor Robert White, York mayor Philip White and Toronto councillors David Rotenberg, Frederick Beavis, and Anthony O'Donohue, described the meeting as a learning experience, stating, "I am in the process of familiarizing myself with urban problems" ("Stanfield Plays").

Stanfield's presence in Toronto continued after his initial dinner with civic leaders. Stanfield even flew to Toronto to speak at a rally called "The City is for People Day" where he called for a federal urban affairs department and the establishment of a parliamentary committee to address urban issues specifically (Crane "Tory Talks"). Stanfield spoke to the crowd about Trudeau's reluctance to address urban issues and attacked his position that the constitution prevented the government from formally entering the municipal policy sphere: "the federal government could be much more active in urban policy right today, without changing a comma in our constitution, if it wanted to be more active" (Crane "Tory Talks"). Stanfield insisted that Trudeau was

finding constitutional arguments against assisting municipalities: “you can find constitutional problems in every box of soap if you want to look for them... I simply suggest we have better things to do in Canada than seek out and magnify every quirk in the constitution” (Crane “Tory Talks”).

Stanfield continued to tour urban centres throughout 1970, gauging their problems and listening to their constituents. Later in the year, Stanfield toured the municipal workings of Toronto, viewing Metro Toronto’s Commissioners Street incinerator, Ontario Hydro’s thermal generating station, the city’s garbage dumping operations, and the Toronto Harbour Commission. He also held meetings with city councillors, the Chairman of the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) and Ontario’s GO Transit, attempting to acquaint himself with the inner workings of Canada’s largest city (“O’Donohue”). Along the way, Stanfield would view a number of sites in need of environmental cleanup, including the mouth of the Don River, leaving Stanfield to state, “it’s quite a mess—as big a mess as I’ve seen” (“O’Donohue”). The tour re-enforced Stanfield’s position on urban issues, and he stated to the media that “Ottawa should both coordinate existing efforts and take a lead in co-operating with both the provinces and the municipalities... but we can’t just talk about it—you’ve also got to spend some money” (“O’Donohue”).

Stanfield reiterated his argument during the summer of 1970 in a speech to the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities, stating that simple federal spending would not reverse urban problems, but a coordinating agency would, signalling his interest again in a federal ministry that dealt solely with urban issues (MacKenzie). Stanfield stated that the current federal–urban policy process was “fragmented” and that a formal federal coordinating ministry would resolve constitutional divisions and end disagreements between the federal government, its provincial counterparts, and municipal governments (Mackenzie).

At the conference, Stanfield also began deconstructing Trudeau’s argument that there were constitutional barriers to federal entry into the urban policy sphere. “The federal government is already in cities, causing problems if not solving them,” stated Stanfield (MacKenzie). “Whenever a federal contract is awarded or cancelled and men get jobs or are laid off them, federal policy affects cities,” Stanfield continued, “and by its policies in trade, in tariffs, in military establishments, it can dictate health or illness or even life or death for a community” (MacKenzie). To Stanfield, the federal government’s existing presence in municipalities was enough justification for a continuation of that presence. He summed up his speech to the assembled delegates by stating, “in other words, the federal government does have power to act, within the constitution, if it has the will” (MacKenzie).

In July of 1970, Stanfield launched an attack against the government's record on urban issues during a speech in Ottawa, stating, "Urban problems are one area where the federal government has been consistent only in being ineffective" (Stanfield). Stanfield continued by attacking Trudeau's position about the constitutional barrier the federal government faced in entering the urban policy arena:

On the one hand, Mr. Trudeau and his colleagues have been hiding behind the constitution to avoid doing anything about city problems. I quite agree that we must be concerned about the spheres of jurisdiction laid down by the constitution and that, for both constitutional and human reasons, the provincial and local government's themselves have the primary role to play. But in terms of co-ordination, of financial aid and general initiative, the federal government also has a role. (Stanfield)

To Stanfield, Trudeau was addressing the problem of urban affairs poorly, using the constitution as an excuse for inaction. Stanfield's position remained consistent: if the Trudeau government would not establish a coordinating ministry, Stanfield would.

Stanfield would not wait to win government to begin his work though. On Stanfield's instructions, Progressive Conservative MP Alvin Hamilton began a caucus task force on urban affairs in July of 1970 (Seale "Rustic Manner"). Hamilton would spend time researching urban issues, consulting relevant urban stakeholders and proposing solutions that would find their way into the Conservative's 1972 election platform. One of the initial plans that Hamilton imagined was a system of regional agencies that would assist municipalities (Seale "Rustic Manner"). Hamilton acknowledged the constitutional problems encountered with federal assistance to municipalities but believed that he had a way to bypass them: extra-constitutional regional governments with powers and funds delegated from senior governments on an ad hoc basis (Seale "Rustic Manner"). Hamilton's plan was imaginative, but he believed that imagination was the only way to solve the federal-urban policy conundrum, stating, "Politicians have imaginations, so they can get things done" (Seale "Rustic Manner").

Trudeau's inaction created an opportunity for Robert Stanfield—an opportunity he decided to capitalize upon. Stanfield began to tour urban centres, meeting with municipal officials and courting civic leaders. He spoke in front of crowds of urban activists, chastising Trudeau and openly contesting the Trudeauvian view of federalism, and he created a caucus task force to study urban issues. The combination of internal dissent and external political threat was placing more and more pressure on Trudeau.

## **Trudeau Relents**

With pressure to act mounting from within his caucus and from his political rivals, Trudeau began slowly and announced the creation of the National Urban Affairs Council in October 1970 (Newman “Provinces”). This process was meant to bring municipalities, provincial governments and the federal government together to help coordinate urban policy. Once announced though, it became clear that Trudeau’s critics were still unsatisfied.

Pierre Trudeau appointed Housing Minister Robert Andras as the “spokesman on urban affairs” and tasked him with finding a political solution to the growing chorus of discontent at the municipal level (Cullingworth 34). Taking quick action, Andras established a commission led by Carleton University professor N. H. Lithwick to address the situation (Cullingworth 34). Lithwick’s report clearly laid out several problems that urban Canada was experiencing. The most urgent though, was economic development. Urban centres, argued Lithwick, were the economic drivers of the entire country (Cullingworth 36). In short, the development of the national economy was explicitly linked to the urbanization process (Cullingworth 36). This development was hampered though because of the innate problems municipalities faced, such as transportation and immigration problems, environmental degradation, and housing shortages. To Lithwick, these were significant obstacles since “the major forces influencing cities do not lie within their control” (Cullingworth 36).

Lithwick argued in favour of the establishment of a federal urban ministry. His logic was simple: because the health of cities affects national economic development, the health of cities affects all Canadians and because all Canadians are affected, the federal government needed to ensure that cities were healthy, safe, and productive. As such, the federal government did have a role to play in the urban sphere. With the arguments of his caucus, the opposition, and now one of Canada’s most noted municipal experts against him, Trudeau relented. The creation of the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs was announced on 30 June 1971 with the stated goal of “the development and application of policies to influence the urbanization process” (Ministry of State for Urban Affairs 1).

## **Conclusion**

To create the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs, Pierre Trudeau not only had to acknowledge that his opponents, both within his own party and outside it, had a legitimate case for engaging Canada’s municipalities, but also had to accept that his view of federalism was too rigid. He needed to compromise his cautious nature in the face of mounting political challenges in the urban realm.

The Ministry of State for Urban Affairs was a concession on Trudeau’s part, but it did not come easily. Trudeau was a reluctant urbanist. He not only faced criticism within his caucus but also lost key members of his caucus and

cabinet. Paul Hellyer resigned his cabinet post because he felt that Trudeau's vision of federalism was creating policy vacuums, ignoring the key housing and urban regeneration files. Robert Givens resigned his seat because of Trudeau's reluctance to address urban issues, opting instead to run for Robert Nixon's provincial Liberals, a party and a leader he felt would provide more assistance to urban centres. Perry Ryan crossed the floor because he felt that Trudeau was doing too little for Toronto and that Robert Stanfield, the leader of the Progressive Conservatives—who was making inroads within Toronto politics and advancing urban issues while criticizing Trudeau's inaction—would address urban issues better.

Trudeau's political rivals, sensing that he had lost touch with urban Canada, began to make advances towards urban advocates and civic leaders as well. Progressive Conservative leader Robert Stanfield made it clear that if Trudeau would not act to engage the nation's municipalities, he would. With pressure mounting, Trudeau relented and began to study the issue through the National Urban Affairs Council in 1970. Trudeau went further soon after and enlisted Professor N. H. Lithwick to study the state of urban affairs in Canada and, upon receiving Lithwick's recommendations, created the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs.

The process that created the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs was long and one that Trudeau did not embark upon easily. His resolve was tested and with it, his vision of federalism was contested. Canada's political reality clashed with his theoretical conceptualization of its federation. While Trudeau's early writings suggest that he believed in a compartmentalized view of Canadian federalism, he did acknowledge that change was needed over time for the federation to survive. Trudeau argues that "the compromise of federalism is generally reached under a very particular set of circumstances. As time goes by these circumstances change... to meet these changes, the terms of the federative pact must be altered" (*The Essential Trudeau* 121). Trudeau quite possibly believed that Canada's sustained urbanization required a unique policy response. He changed the pact, but not after sustained opposition to engaging Canada's urban centres.

Trudeau's concession marked the initiation of formal federal–local relations in Canada. MSUA engaged municipalities like no other federal department before it, filling a policy vacuum and marking a shift in how Canadians viewed their urban space. With these two factors juxtaposed, the creation of MSUA can be seen as a shift in our national thinking on both federalism and urbanism.

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