

the arts

Baring the Roots of Complicity

In Defence of Canada
Indochina: Roots of Complicity
 by James Eayrs
 University of Toronto Press, 1983
 348 pages
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Review by Geoff Martin

Complicity is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as the state "being an accomplice; partnership in an evil action."

In this, the fifth volume in his *In Defence of Canada* series, Dalhousie University professor James Eayrs sets out to prove that Canada's role in the International Control and Supervision Commission in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (beginning in 1954) made Canada an accomplice of United States foreign policy. In this he is successful.

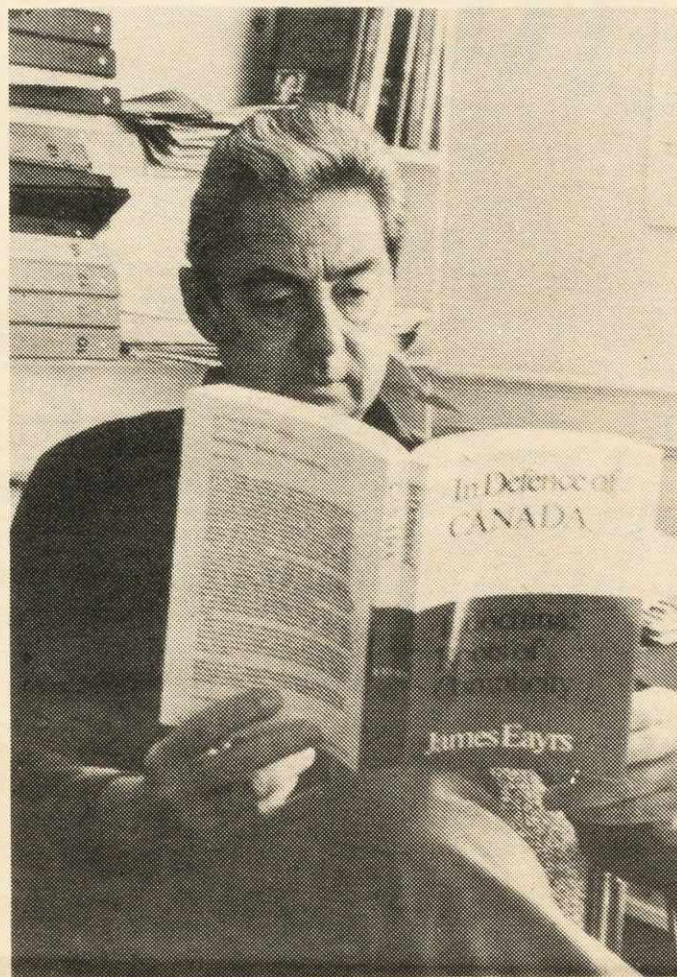
What Professor Eayrs has written is the definitive work on Canada's early role in Indochina, primarily spanning the years 1954 to 1957. In his nine chapters, he provides us with a stunning amount of detail and background surrounding each of the three commissions, the three commissions' members (Canada, Poland and India), and the general situation in Indochina. It is enjoyable reading, partly because of Eayrs' dry wit and lively style.

Professor Eayrs used mainly American government documents to show how Canada became an accomplice to American foreign policy in Indochina. As early as November of 1954, Canada was relaying information to the U.S. State Department dealing with military intelligence, relations with France and the commission activities in the area. And as the author points out, there was an inherent conflict between Canada's first priority ("maintenance of the peace") and that of the United States (prevent "communist hegemony") right from the beginning.

The book's only weakness is the occasional lack of Canadian primary documentation. The government of Canada's refusal to release documentation has forced Professor Eayrs (and many of his colleagues) to refer frequently to American documents when writing about Canadian foreign policy. Considering this departure, Professor Eayrs follows a questionable tack at the end of his chapter "ICSC Vietnam."

Specifically, he seems too willing to accept evidence in the *Pengaton Papers*, the "leaked" American history of decision-making in Vietnam, which indicates that in 1964 Prime Minister Pearson knew about American intentions to bomb North Vietnam if negotiations failed, and that Pearson "supported" this bombing.

In the Spring of 1964, Canadian Foreign Service Officer Blair Seaborn was sent to Hanoi at American request to deliver messages, specifically threats of war, with the hope that the North Vietnamese would stop supporting the



Dr. James Eayrs of Dalhousie's Political Science department scanning his most recently published book.

Viet Cong insurgents in the south.

For most people in Canada, sending Seaborn to Hanoi was perfectly justifiable in the context of preserving the peace and "containing communism." Most would contend the issue is the question of American sincerity. Did the United States ask Canada to send Seaborn with a view to legitimizing an escalation in the war ("Operation Rolling Thunder"), or was the United States sincere in proposing "carrots and sticks" to the North Vietnamese?

Eayrs says that while the evidence is not "incontrovertible," he "surmises" the "Johnson Administration knew that it was negotiating with North Vietnam in bad faith and used Canada to do so." However, Eayrs may have gone too far in accepting the "official U.S. record" on a number of points connected with the Canadian position.

The classic incident happened in New York City between Prime Minister Pearson and President Johnson on May 28, 1964, when Pearson is reported in the *Pengaton Papers* as having said he expressed concern about the nature of the "sticks," specifically "he stipulated that he would have great reservations about the use of nuclear weapons, but indicated that the punitive striking of discriminate targets by careful iron bomb attacks would be a 'different thing.'" According to the American documents, "he also said he would personally understand our (U.S.) resorting

to such measures if the messages transmitted through the Canadian channel failed to produce any alleviation of North Vietnamese aggression."

American documents in this case are questionable for several reasons. The writer of the report, McGeorge Bundy, Johnson's National Security Advisor, may have misinterpreted what Pearson said, or some statements may have been purposely misrepresented to garner support within the administration for the case of eventual escalation.

Considering Pearson's peace record, his strong denial of the changes, and the absence of any Canadian documents in this case, any firm conclusion seems untenable.

When the last major book on this subject came out, making stronger accusations but a weaker case, Senator Paul Martin wrote a scathing review consisting of a personal denial and harsh criticism of the author, Toronto journalist Charles Taylor.

Despite this inevitable controversy, Professor Eayrs has written a commendable book on a difficult subject, a book which will remain the authoritative work until the Canadian government releases documents on the subject.

JAMES EAYRS is Eric Dennis Memorial Professor of Government and Political Science at Dalhousie University and author of several previous books, including Volumes 1-4 of *In Defence of Canada and Diplomacy and its Discontents*.

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