

Toward an independent foreign policy

by Pauline Jewett

There is a lack of independence in Canadian foreign policy that historically and currently provides much of the basis for the New Democratic Party's critique of the conduct of Canada's external relations and provides much of the basis for the NDP's own foreign policy deliberations.

When 2,000 New Democrats met in Federal Convention last July they were presented with thirty-six resolutions on international affairs. A common theme in these resolutions was the lack of independence from Washington in the conduct and making of Canadian foreign policy. New Democrats called on the Conservative government to say "No" to Star Wars and to commit Canada to the preservation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. At the same time the party called for radical reductions in US and Soviet nuclear arms, a mutual superpower nuclear weapons freeze and an end to the militarization of the Arctic and outer space. The biennial convention of the Party also called for stronger Canadian support for Contadora, an end to US dominated militarization of Central America and more active Canadian support for the achievements and goals of the Nicaraguan revolution. The Party called on the Canadian government to support New Zealand's stand against nuclear weapons in its harbors.

The concern of New Democrats with international affairs reflects a long standing tradition of the NDP, and its forerunner the CCF. New Democrats believe that part of democratic socialism is a commitment to the concerns and struggles of people, especially workers, women, the oppressed and the dispossessed the world over. The concern of New Democrats with independence in Canadian foreign policy reflects a deep and long standing concern about Canadian political, cultural and economic independence from the United States. It is a rejection of superpower global domination and "spheres of influence." It is an expression born, not of anti-Americanism, but rather of concern about Canada's unique and perilous proximity to the United States. And it is an expression of faith in what Canada and Canadians can be.

This concern about Canadian independence as part of democratic socialist foreign policy is reflected, as well, in the Party's parliamentary activities. In the House of Commons New Democrats have not only led but often been the only voices in opposition to the "quiet acquiescence" of Canada to US foreign policy leadership. From Vietnam to

Cruise missile tests to the NDP's present challenge of the NORAD arrangements the Party's parliamentary record is clear and consistent.

To call for Canadian foreign policy independence means to call for major changes to the way policy is made and to the way policy makers think. While some decisions are made in Washington — such as the deployment of nuclear weapons to Canada at a time of crisis — it is the context of such decision making and the post-World War Two cross-border integration of institutions and of elites that marks the lack of independence in Canadian international policy. Our defence and foreign policy makers and those who carry out the conduct of these policies have traditionally shared class, cultural and educational experience with their counterparts in the United States. These groups have been dominated by male elites who share common attitudes and world views.

Canadian decision and policy makers have also shared with their American counterparts a set of assumptions about Canada, including assumptions about the common defence of North America, about the desire and viability of the American-arranged and -led postwar economic system, a willingness to accept a threat of use of nuclear weapons as the basis of common security, and a role for Canada in the world as a small, loyal "European" ally (remember Canada was handled by the Western European desk of the US State Department until recently).

Furthermore, the Canadian policy elite has harbored its own assumptions about Canada: that Canada cannot be fully independent from US foreign policy, that Canadian foreign policy independence must be drastically circumscribed by fear of US "retaliation," that the Canadian economy and Canadian prosperity can only be sustained by massive, "user friendly" economic links with US multinationals and capital, that Canada can only select, at any one time, limited specific opportunities for variance from US policies. And there has been a major assumption that it is natural and in Canada's best interests to be and remain a largely unquestioning US military alliance partner.

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