

Rhetoric and performance in foreign policy

Conferences. In Ottawa, for example, the unsympathetic approach of the Reagan administration to non-aligned Third World countries, and their disinclination to talk at all about North-South issues, was in part overcome, in no small measure due to the influence of Trudeau as Chairman. And similarly, if nothing tangible emerged from the Cancun meeting, the Prime Minister played his part in keeping the notion of a global dialogue in being, thereby enhancing his own and Canada's stature in the Third World.

Performance versus promise

The value of this performance, however, is unlikely to be great if the Prime Minister now allows time to pass without further involvement and initiatives in the development of Canadian policy. With financial survival now replacing development as the immediate concern of the developed states, the international prospects for multi-material initiatives are bleak. It is logical, therefore, to look for evidence of the Prime Minister's intent in the independent initiatives which Canada might take in its relations with Third World countries, but it is precisely in this area that the Prime Minister seems to avoid involvement.

He has made very little effort, for example, to respond to the extremely active debate on North-South issues in the Parliamentary Committee, which has become the focus of public debate on Canada's foreign policy, particularly toward Central America, in the past year. (See "Foreign policy formulation — a preliminary breakthrough," by J.B. Walker in this journal for May/June 1982.) It is true that the Department of External Affairs responded formally to the Committee report on North-South relations, but it is difficult to see Prime Ministerial involvement in that response, which was in any case quite unhelpful. In the present economic circumstances it may be asking too much of the Liberal government to reduce restrictions on imports from developing countries, but that hardly justifies the External reply which suggested that the problems were insignificant. Nor was there much illumination in the government's response to a task force recommendation that there be a public inquiry into the problems of Canadian industry facing developing country competition. That published reply told us

The Government will be making decisions shortly. When the decisions are announced the Government will be in a position to make known the factors leading to the positions adopted.

And perhaps the repeated recommendations that the aid program be more concentrated and better coordinated with other aspects of foreign policy is too detailed an issue to engage the attention of the Prime Minister, but somewhere in all this one looks for initiatives which will translate the philosophic discourses and international reputation of the Prime Minister into hard policy choices on North-South relations.

Mixed up in the Caribbean and Latin America

Opportunities are not lacking. The inquiries of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee into Canada's relations with the Caribbean and Latin America, for example, clearly reveal the ferment of the hemisphere and the importance of Canadian policy. President Reagan's Caribbean

Basin initiative, whether one likes it or not, spells out an overall American strategy for the region which rests on quite clear preferences for private sector development, and assumptions linking political instability to external, Soviet-inspired intervention. By contrast Canadian policy is quite uncoordinated. The aid program to the Caribbean is large, and so far resists the political ties preferred by the Reagan government, but it is unrelated to any broad conception of Canadian policy in the region. The policy of bilateralism, *inter alia*, indicates a concentration of commercial effort in selected Latin American countries, but these are precisely the countries in which human rights issues are the most troublesome. Even the Conservative foreign policy critic John Crosbie, for example, not previously known to have a keen interest in human rights issues, is reported to have returned from a Committee inquiry in Chile horrified at the plight of individuals and groups oppressed by the Chilean government. The relationship of development to stability in the Caribbean and Central America, particularly the relationship between external intervention, internal political change and fundamental economic rights, is unaddressed by the Canadian Government, no doubt for fear of raising yet another conflict with Washington, but in stark contrast to the high-minded rhetoric of the Mansion House speech.

Is it therefore too much to ask that the Prime Minister involve himself more closely in such a case by way of furthering his general interest in development? It is true that External Affairs is notoriously weak in personnel knowledgeable about Latin America. It may be that the tangle of interests and competing bureaucracies allow no more than incremental adjustments to existing policies. But however well-crafted, there is no room for more speeches by Mr. Trudeau of a general nature. What is now required in this particular case is a Canadian Caribbean policy which would embody some of the general declarations of North-South policy which Mr. Trudeau has stated so eloquently.

Arms control

Mr. Trudeau's equivalent of the Mansion House speech in the security area was his speech to UNSSOD I in May 1978. In a forceful review of disarmament issues, the Prime Minister caught the imagination of many both inside and outside Canada with his argument for "a strategy of suffocation by depriving the arms race of the oxygen on which it feeds." As he acknowledged recently, the elements of that strategy were not new — a comprehensive test ban, an end to the flight testing of all new strategic delivery vehicles, a prohibition on the production of fissionable material for weapons purposes and an agreement to progressively limit military expenditure — but the combination appeared to offer a direction and a focus for arms control, with some hope of measuring progress in the strangulation process.

Four years later, in a speech to the Notre Dame University Convocation in May 1982, Mr. Trudeau spoke of the response to that strategy: "In the absence of a positive response from any quarter, the Canadian Government subsequently endorsed NATO's two-track approach — seeking to improve our defensive position by preparing to introduce new intermediate range weapons in Europe, while at the same time pursuing arms reductions negotiations." It was in this context, he said, that Canada had