

*Diversity
of opinions
on mid-East
problems*

When Mr. MacEachen left Ottawa, the word from the experts was that Canada must move closer to the PLO cause. The Minister returned home somewhat surprised that the domestic PLO controversy and the resultant moving of the UN crime conference from Toronto were not weighing heavy on Arab minds and that there was no real unanimity in the Arab world itself about the PLO.

He went to Jerusalem prepared to argue the benefits of Israeli attendance at the United Nations conference on human settlements, *Habitat*, in Vancouver in June despite PLO attendance. But he was caught by surprise when the Israelis said they had already announced that they would be attending.

He heard a diversity of opinions about the Palestinian question in general, about Lebanon and possible Syrian influence there, about disengagement and the possibility of maintaining it, and returned home depressed concerning the prospects of Middle East peace. Saudi Arabia and Iraq expressed strong reservations, at least, and some pessimism over disengagement. They said there could be no peace until the Palestinians had a home.

But, if it is possible to ignore that gloomy outlook, the Minister left the region reasonably content. Both Israeli and Arab saw use for a newly-invoked Canadian role as a carrier and explainer of policies. As Mr. Riad, Secretary-General of the Arab League, said in a Cairo interview, if Mr. MacEachen would accept some Arab truths, he could seek to convince others in the West. He noted that Canada was not without influence, even in Washington. Some Israeli foreign office officials had the same idea when talking in post-visit interviews. They saw Mr. MacEachen as a man who could quietly seek to persuade African and Asian leaders at least to moderate anti-Israeli stances.

Both Arab and Israeli — particularly the former — saw the trip as important because it gave them an opportunity to put their points of view to a country that had stood aloof from most Middle East affairs for years, concentrating its efforts on peace-keeping alone. "We do not seek to make you pro-Arab," Mr. Riad said, "only to make you understand our point of view." And leaders went to great lengths to explain that view to the Canadian Minister, who glided into their busy and sometimes lavish airports aboard a modest little two-engine, propellor-driven Armed Forces aircraft, complete with a small staff and a handful of reporters.

Of course, he met all his opposite numbers — Ismail Fahmy of Egypt, Prince

Saud al Faisal of Saudi Arabia, Sa'adeh of Jordan, Sa'asoun Hammadi of Iraq and Yigal Allon of Israel. But he met the real powers of the Middle East: Egypt's Sadat, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Fahd ibn Abdul Aziz, Jordan's King Hussein, Iraq's Vice-Chairman Hussein Tikriti, as well as Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. That his hosts attached importance to Mr. MacEachen's visit was shown by the fact that Sadat, Hussein, Saud, Hammadi and Allon accepted the suggestion of Canadian officials that they meet with reporters travelling with him.

Not set in stone

Mr. MacEachen started his trip on the right note by telling Foreign Minister Fahmy at the Cairo airport that Canadian Middle East policy was not set in stone and was susceptible of change. He also made a couple of token gestures, announcing a contribution of \$1 million to an international Suez fund and saying that Egypt could be eligible for some Canadian aid if only it would decide what it wanted besides a CANDU reactor (which it could not have).

He was not pressed to recognize the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinians — in fact, Mr. Fahmy made a point of not pushing recognition. Later Mr. Sadat told a news conference that Canada would help the cause of peace if it did recognize the PLO, but certain officials pointed out that he could hardly say so in response to a public question. Mr. Sadat also spoke enthusiastically of the new era in Canada-Egypt relations, and a couple of weeks later a spokesman for his office said the ice in relations between the two countries had been broken by the visit.

Egypt, like all Arab countries, looks with some envy at Canadian technology and technologists. Throughout the trip the point was sometimes quietly made to reporters that the Arabs liked the idea of being able to get American-oriented technology without necessarily being stuck with American ideology. Egypt needed the technology for the complete rebuilding job it had started and hoped to continue if war could be avoided. Saudi Arabia, with a \$145-billion, five-year, development plan and Iraq with a \$45-billion one, needed many kinds of expert, especially those in communications, a Canadian specialty. Jordan, with a more modest plan, made a request for Canadian expertise but officials made it clear to reporters that such help could be used.

In Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Mr. MacEachen signed a memorandum of agreement covering commercial co-operation