

*Embarrassing
shortcomings
in Canada's
response to
Third World*

Trudeau for personal commitment to the cause of global equity.

Some of the Government's actions have been consistent with the Trudeau rhetoric. Until 1976, the proportion of Canada's gross national product committed to official development assistance had climbed steadily to .56 per cent, within hailing distance of the United Nations approved target of .7 per cent. Canada in 1977 took a useful initiative in cancelling debts owed by the poorest of the aid-recipients. It has recently been active in the UN, and quietly effective, in seeking to accelerate decolonization in southern Africa. In 1972, Ottawa acted quickly in receiving many of the victims of Idi Amin's racism. Despite considerable weariness, we continue to assist Third World countries by being the UN's most reliable supplier of efficient peace-keepers.

The shortcomings in Canada's response to legitimate Third World demands, however, are increasingly obvious and embarrassing. The proportion of GNP spent on development assistance dropped in 1976 to less than .5 per cent, and in 1978, as part of an economy drive, the Government cancelled the increase planned for the following year. Canada long dragged its feet in introducing the generalized system of tariff preferences to benefit the exports of less-developed countries. The imposition in 1976 of quotas on textile and clothing imports was directly contrary to Canada's commitment to the New International Economic Order. Despite belated support for a buffer fund to cushion swings in commodity prices, Canada retains a well-earned reputation for niggardliness in the UN Conference on Trade and Development and for opposition to reforms of the international monetary system that would benefit the LDCs. Canada's exceptional influence in the Law of the Sea Conference has contributed to the sabotage of the "Common Heritage" proposals that could have effected a really significant transfer of resources to the very needy.

Discrepancy

How is one to explain this discrepancy between promise and performance in Canada's response to the rising demand for global equity? Assuming, as is likely, that Trudeau's personal concern is genuine, it is unfortunate that he is not the autocrat so often portrayed in Parliament and the media. Indeed, in terms of Cabinet management, he is arguably the most consensual Prime Minister Canada has ever had. Ottawa officials and ministers certainly

act as a rule in Third World matters and they need pay little heed to his announcements. Since they perceive Canadian participation in international development to be essentially a matter of altruism, conscience, and nothing in which Canada has a vital stake, they attach low priority to meeting the challenges posed by the Third World. Their diagnosis of the problem seems radical, but their prescriptions are conservative.

This is the depressing conclusion to be drawn from the response to 35 Third World questions put to nearly 300 Members of Parliament and officials in interviews conducted by the authors as part of the Canadian International Image Study (CIIS), which is described in the Summer 1977 issue of *International Journal*.

Ottawa's foreign-policy elite readily agrees that the rich-poor dichotomy is the most serious threat to stability, peace, and is willing to increase Canadian aid budget. Aid, however, is what Lester Pearson and others have described as a "soft option". Though still relevant, Canada can scarcely begin to implement the structural changes required if Third World poverty and dependence are to be alleviated. When it comes to more significant reforms, especially those that are politically difficult, our foreign-policy makers sing a different tune. By a two-to-one margin, for example, those we interviewed rejected the proposal that Canada should speedily remove tariffs on imports from developing countries. Asked to name the most important problem confronting Canadian foreign policy, less than a tenth mentioned one related to the Third World. Similarly, when invited to rank the themes from *Foreign Policy for Canada* (the Trudeau Government's definitive statement of 1970), "Social Justice", a theme embracing economic redistribution and race equality, came a poor fifth, below "Peace and Security", "Sovereignty and Independence", "Economic Growth" and "Quality of Life".

A separate study of foreign-policy priorities in the Department of External Affairs was even more revealing, and disturbing. This was conducted by Professors Brian Tomlin, Harald von Riekl and John Sigler. Fourteen carefully selected senior officials were invited to weigh 77 specific foreign-policy objectives derived from a study of internal public statements. Only one primary concern with the Third World — peace in the Middle East — was placed in the top 25. Dominating the top-ranked objectives were those having to do with