

Instead, the peace movement has encountered the inertia of a citizenry which has traditionally demonstrated a persistent and seemingly paradoxical ambivalence on the issues of "peace," as the results of the most recent CIIPS annual public opinion survey demonstrate so nicely. On the one hand, Canadians in large numbers are more than willing to support the good works of "peace." They will dutifully register their dislike of nuclear weapons with pollsters; they will show a disinclination to spend too much on defence during peacetime; they support their government in its peacekeeping missions and other good works internationally; they even acquiesce in the channelling of state funds to groups which are self-consciously devoted to altering current government defence policy.

On the other hand, Canadians in equally large numbers are as prone to support all of the *bêtes noires* of the peace movement: nuclear weapons (as long as they aren't Canadian) and nuclear deterrence, alignment with the West in international politics, membership in a military alliance, cooperation with the United States in air defence, and military spending. Their definition of "peace," in other words, does not involve a rejection of the tools for war.

More important, and no doubt much to the chagrin of the peace movement, Canadians show a stubborn consensus on such questions. One conspicuous measure of this consensus is that pollsters who plumb the depths of Canadian opinion always find in their representative samples hugely high levels of support for the North Atlantic alliance and the aerospace defence agreement with the United States. Whether it be the United States Information Agency (USIA), Gallup, Goldfarb, or CIIPS, the result is invariably the same: indeed, the USIA poll in 1984 uncovered an almost unbelievable level of support for NATO membership – eighty-nine percent – as close to political unanimity as one is likely to get. Likewise, the annual CIIPS public opinion surveys for 1987 and 1988, both confirm that widespread consensus.

Another measure of this consensus is to be found in the voting pattern of Canadians over the last three decades. To be sure, we have little direct evidence that most Canadians persistently consign the NDP to the margins of politics *because* it advocates abandoning an aligned defence posture. On the other hand, there can be little doubt that if Canadians had wanted an alternative defence policy seriously enough, they would not have allowed the NDP, as the only party which embraces a genuine alternative, to languish in political oblivion for so long. Likewise, if the attitudes of Canadians on defence had shifted significantly, it is likely that this shift would have been reflected in the policy platforms of one, or both, of the "major" parties.

BUT IT IS NOT SIMPLY THE ABSENCE of divergent opinion that dampens debate on defence. A second reason is that there is no clash of concrete interests. It is important to recognize that what opposition there is to Canada's present security posture stems from symbolic, as opposed to concrete, interests. The difference, it can be suggested, is significant for an understanding of why there is so little conflict in Canada over defence matters, for there are very few Canadians whose real interests are directly and negatively affected by the defence policies being pursued by the government in Ottawa. For example, the interests of a member of a peace group advocating non-alignment will not be directly and concretely affected by the Canadian government's maintenance of ties with the North Atlantic alliance – protestations to

the contrary notwithstanding. This is not to deny that peace activists may have a deeply-felt symbolic interest in having their country withdraw from military alliances; but their concrete interests will not be affected by a failure to achieve that goal. Such a perspective, for example, underlay the Supreme Court's response to Operation Dismantle's suit in 1984 that cruise missile testing violated Canadians' right to life under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In throwing out the suit, the Court argued that testing did not pose an imminent threat to the concrete interests of Canadians.

The symbolic nature of the interests of the opponents of Canada's current defence posture may be usefully contrasted with those whose concrete interests would be affected by a change in alignment. And there can be little doubt that a Canadian withdrawal from NATO or a renegotiation of NORAD would involve some considerable concrete, predominantly economic, costs. For example, a government which implemented the kind of policy embraced by the NDP – taking over all air surveillance and interception roles for the Arctic approaches to North America – would have to cover the costs of acquiring all of the North Warning System facilities, approximately ninety percent of the capital costs of which were paid for by the United States, and which would surely not be simply donated to Canada. Similarly, all of the costs of appropriate military hardware, infrastructure, and maintenance would have to be borne by Ottawa. And while the NDP has argued that what Canada spends now on maintaining troops

in Europe would be transferred to pay for a Canadianized air defence system, the figures make little sense. Not only would they not pay for it, but the resources cannot be transferred in such a simplistic manner in the first place. (Indeed, it is ironic that the NDP, whose opposition to NATO and NORAD is in large measure fuelled by antipathy towards military spending, would end up embracing the most militaristic peacetime defence budget in Canadian history.) Of course, to this burden one has to add the costs, economic and other, which would surely be imposed on Canada by our present allies, who, not unnaturally, would not be at all well disposed to a Canadian defection from the Western defence system. In short, the concrete interests of the vast majority of Canadians would be adversely affected by a shift in defence posture.

HOWEVER FASHIONABLE IT MAY BE in some quarters to characterize the average Canadian as one gulled into support for alignment by a system dutifully acting as a cat's paw for a continental capitalist class, in fact most Canadians have made a careful calculation about the consequences of embracing an alternative defence policy. They have consistently acted as though their concrete interests would be adversely affected by such a move. Moreover, they have exhibited in their political behaviour (that is, their periodic voting) a willingness to be more active in defence of those concrete interests than those individuals whose interests in an alternative defence policy are only symbolic.

Viewed from this perspective, it is little wonder that we have no real debate on security matters. There is too much agreement on the essentials, and too few divergent concrete interests to make a difference where they have the most impact in democratic politics: in the electoral arena. Likewise, it is not clear that one should be concerned about the implications of this for the vibrancy of politics in Canada; Canadians show far too much disposition to debate vigorously policy issues that genuinely do divide them for one to be too worried about the health of democratic debate. □



Bob Fother