

The Venice summit

THE MAJOR PLAYERS of the industrialized world went home from Venice this week after delivering a tepid message of success while obfuscating, where considered necessary, in the niceties of several languages, the product of three days of talk.

Almost every proposal adopted contained some rider that let one or more of the parties off the political hook back home or left open some future option more to one's liking.

They wanted one of their number's record deficit reduced, but would not name the United States as the "offender"; set out to develop new ways of looking at economic indicators, but got agreement only with a pledge to keep data confidential, which neatly eliminated one avenue of future pressure.

The instability of world agricultural markets was a major point of contention, the Germans winning out in the end by getting the seven to adopt a proposal to negotiate a condition devoid of deadlines.

Canada's attempts to seal a new trading arrangement with the United States could well have been in the back of some minds when the summit seven called for a reduction of protectionist measures that "exacerbate the problems of development and indebtedness." The final communique made no specific references to the mood to the contrary in the U.S. or to Japan's traditional behaviour of selling everywhere while not buying to the same degree.

It was clear that six of the leaders wanted nothing to do with the in-

creasing U.S. tactical presence in the Persian Gulf beyond urging that Gulf shipping lanes be kept open.

The industrial giants may or may not deal with the problem of third-world debt by lowering interest rates, extending grace periods and purchasing goods, one of items brought up by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. There is little sympathy in the U.S. for the concept, however. The other Mulroney proposal, action on South Africa, simply was not on for the Germans, and the British warned against any new initiatives for the time being. The seven settled for a moral condemnation that somehow seemed to fall short of even the message of hope which Mr. Mulroney wanted to send to young Africans tuned to the airwaves of the world.

If there was any consistency, it was on the subject of AIDS, terrorism and illicit drugs. It is apparent that at the highest political levels there now is a distinct awareness of the health menace of the acquired immune deficiency syndrome. Terrorism remains anathema, and the drug war is to be continued and enhanced, a topical subject back home for Mr. Mulroney in the light of a justice ministry plea before a Manitoba court that Canadians accused of drug trafficking in the United States be extradited.

So, of what immediate value was the summit? Perhaps French President Francois Mitterrand pointed to one clear result: "It's a way of deepening connections." It might also be a stepping stone to more concrete action on many pressing problems.

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