

Canada, Israelis and Arabs

The price of partiality

Canada's ability to influence the peace process has nevertheless declined sharply. Failure to maintain a reputation for objectivity is not the only cause, but it is certainly important. Moreover, our obvious partiality for Israel has impeded the increase of Canadian exports to the area, almost the only fragment of the Third World with customers able to buy substantial quantities of the manufactured goods that Canadians long to sell in order to diminish their trade dependence upon the United States, by far the greatest constraint on our autonomy.

Why, in view of all this, does Ottawa persist in its pro-Israel posture? Most foreigners, and many Canadians, assume it is due to US pressure, or at least example. This is emphatically not the case. Similarities in policy derive from similar domestic pressures and processes; they do not exist because either government dictates to the other. Canada could emulate the more balanced West European attitude without prejudicing its vital relations with Washington. On occasion, such as Clark's Jerusalem caper, Canada has been even more supportive of Israel than has the United States. More recently, it easily ignored American hints that our experienced soldiers would be welcome in Sinai. Canada's relations with Cuba, and its early recognition of the Chinese Peoples' Republic, provide further evidence that Ottawa is able and willing to determine its own foreign policy, especially when it comes to establishing diplomatic relations.

At least as obvious is the fact that Canada's diplomatic tilt towards Israel does not reflect the views of Canada's diplomatic experts. In 1975-76 the Canadian International Image Study persuaded over 300 federal decision-makers to evaluate the impact of twenty international actors on a scale of one (positive) to seven (negative). Although this was before the Sadat peace initiative, and before the election of the Begin government, Egypt emerged at close to mid-point, while Israel was rated close to the bottom. Only North Vietnam, South Africa and the PLO were lower; the USSR, Warsaw Pact and China were all higher. Other responses, as reported in *International Journal* in 1977, tended to confirm that Ottawa mandarins consider Israeli policies to be disruptive, and the pressure within Canada of the Zionist lobby to be contrary to sound Canadian policies. It appears likely that the reputations of Egypt and the PLO have risen since 1976 in the eyes of official Ottawa. The same can scarcely be claimed for Israel. Canadian diplomats incline to be especially critical of Canada's pro-Israel tilt while posted to the Middle East or the UN, but I know of none who denies the tilt, or expresses happiness with it.

Canada's trade with Israel seems likely to remain modest. Prospects in the Arab world, especially the oil-rich portion, are decidedly better. Countries like Saudi Arabia already purchase substantial quantities of manufactured goods and expert services. Although this attractive trade was clearly at risk during the Jerusalem embassy caper, and Arab leaders frequently complain of Canada's pro-Israel sympathies, it is difficult to estimate the increase in exports that might result from a more evenhanded posture. The business community, however, and the government's trade officials, have certainly urged the Cabinet to drop proposals, such as anti-boycott legislation, that would please Israel at the cost of further antagonizing the Arabs. Canada, moreover, was a target of the politically-motivated

Arab oil blockade of 1973. Although less dependent than most oil importers, Canada's energy security is clearly not enhanced by its prevailing posture towards the Middle East.

Erosion of support for Israel in Canada

At the beginning, the Christian churches were overwhelmingly sympathetic to Israel. Their bible, as Lester Pearson noted in explaining his own bias, fosters the conviction the Jews belong in Palestine, and churchmen were especially conscious of both the monstrous crimes of the Nazis, and also the discrimination practised against Jews in other Christian countries, not least Canada. The Vatican, however, has always had reservations about the political claims of the state of Israel, and it has become more sympathetic to the plight of the displaced Palestinians. Senior Roman Catholic prelates maintain contact with the PLO. For years the most prominent Canadian advocate of the Palestinian cause was the Rev. A. C. Forrest, Editor of the United Church's widely-circulated periodical, *The Observer*. He won considerable support among other church leaders but, as on most political issues, they probably had little impact on the church rank-and-file. Nevertheless it seems safe to say that institutional Christianity is no longer a major factor in determining Canada's Middle East policy.

A similar conclusion should probably be drawn about the media. Its anti-Arab bias has often been blatant. Despite a recent improvement in objectivity, and frequent editorials critical of Israeli expansionism, the bias remains significant. *The Globe and Mail*, for example, still accords Zionist spokesmen privileges denied the leadership of all other religious or ethnic groups. The question remains whether the media lead public opinion or simply cater to it. Certainly public opinion polls have from the start revealed a consistently pro-Israel bias among Canadians generally. This may be eroding in view of recent Israeli excesses and the forbidding personality of Menachem Begin. It seems probable that the government would not now encounter strong public resistance if it chose to modify its Middle East posture. Nevertheless, the basic sympathy for Israel of most Canadians, coupled with the concern of opinion leaders to avoid the risk of appearing anti-Jewish, are necessary components of an adequate explanation of the success of the Zionist lobby in influencing Canada's external policies.

Canada-Israel Committee

Many Canadian politicians and officials, including Prime Minister Trudeau when he thought he was retiring from public life, have testified to the resources, efficiency and impact of the Canada-Israel Committee, the foreign policy arm of the well-organized Jewish community. Not all Jews are Zionists, of course, and even among the Zionists are to be found vigorous critics of Israeli policies. Nevertheless Canadian Jewry appears to be more homogenous than that of other countries, notably the United States, in its identification with Israel. The Canada-Israel Committee has persuasive credentials to speak for a large majority of Canadian Jews. Even though they comprise a small minority (1.4%) in the country, their apparent cohesiveness gives weight to the representations of their designated spokesmen. And the tactics of their organization have generally been superb.

Indeed the C-IC was recently described as not only the most influential lobby in shaping Canadian foreign policy