

Canada and El Salvador

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With some variations, Canadian policy toward El Salvador and Central America has been following the lead provided by a particularly aggressive and short sighted U.S. Administration. As former External Affairs Minister Mark MacGuigan explained, the Reagan Administration could count on Canada's "quiet acquiescence" to U.S. initiatives *The Globe and Mail*, 5, February 1981.)

Those initiatives are premised on the assumption that the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala, and the Sandinist Revolution in Nicaragua, are the products of Soviet subversion via Cuba. The centerpiece of the U.S. response to this presumed Soviet threat is military containment. The Reagan Administration has been steadily increasing military aid to El Salvador. It is building up the Honduran armed forces for action in both El Salvador and Nicaragua. The remnants of deposed dictator Somoza's national guard are being trained and armed by the U.S. to harass and possibly overthrow the Sandinists. And the Administration is seeking congressional support for resuming full scale military aid to a Guatemalan regime engaged in genocide against its majority Indian population (*Macleans*, 8 November 1982).

The premises on which this militaristic policy is based are wrong, and its pursuit threatens to plunge Central America into a regional war. The level of violence and destruction in the region has escalated dramatically in the last two years. Refugees number over a million while the human rights situation deteriorates daily.

Canada has acquiesced to these U.S. policies to improve the climate for resolving U.S.-Canadian bilateral issues. But, as Stephen Clarkson argues in his recently published *Canada and the Reagan Challenge*, "Trading good Canadian deeds internationally for American concessions bilaterally proved remarkably unsuccessful in the late Seventies and early Eighties" (p.283).

In fact, an independent foreign policy could strengthen Canada's hand in bilateral negotiations while contributing to regional peace.

Certainly Mexico's independent stance seems to make the U.S. treat her Southern neighbour with greater seriousness and respect.

The formulation of a similarly independent Canadian position must begin with a realistic rather than an ideological assessment of the causes of the current crisis.

Those causes do not lie in

As for U.S. charges concerning arms shipments via Cuba to Nicaragua, and on to El Salvador, the former chief of the U.S. State Department's own interests section in Havana, Wayne Smith, argues that the Reagan Administration has made wildly exaggerated claims: "If the guerillas had received all the arms reported by U.S. intelligence, the Salvadorean army would be outgunned 20 to 1" (*Foreign Policy*, Fall 1982).

It is to this regional reality that an independent Canadian foreign policy must be addressed.

First, such a policy must be founded on a commitment to work

the sidelines while the U.S. ignored the call for negotiations.

The Reagan Administration's confrontational tactics and unwillingness to negotiate have been confirmed by various U.S. officials. With special reference to Cuba, Wayne Smith, in the article cited above, described U.S. rejection of Cuban overtures. He faulted the Reagan administration with a lack of "realism" and argued that it "seems determined to make past mistakes all over again."

Canada, as a hemispheric middle power, instead of supporting those mistakes should play a positive role in defusing the escalation of violence by strongly supporting diplomatic solutions.

Second, an independent foreign policy must address the causes of the region's crisis. To satisfy the basic needs of the region's majorities, a commitment to facilitate more equitable forms of development is required. This means the provision of bilateral and multilateral aid to those governments which manifest a genuine willingness to implement socio-economic reforms to improve the living standards of the poor.

Specifically, Canada should provide significant amounts of long term bilateral support to Nicaragua and begin to plan for reconstruction aid to El Salvador within the framework of the French and Mexican initiatives or other regional programmes by like minded countries. Nicaragua's Sandinist government has demonstrated its capacity to provide for the basic nutritional, health, educational, housing and employment needs of its population. It is to be hoped that the government which ultimately gains power in El Salvador will be able to do the same.

In this light, the Canadian government's decision to designate Honduras as a project country for CIDA aid is particularly unfortunate. U.S. military and clandestine programmes are fortifying those Honduran institutions most opposed to sponsoring equitable development.

They are also rapidly polarizing and destabilizing the country's internal politics. Moreover, the large-scale infrastructure projects now assisted by Canada can be used for military or strategic purposes but will do little or nothing to respond to the needs of the Honduran poor.

Furthermore, the commitment to help those nations which help their poor should be reflected in Canada's positions in multilateral institutions - the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

Third, the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have fled El Salvador and Guatemala, and the even larger numbers of internal refugees in both countries, need generous humanitarian attention. Support for U.N. and N.G.O. administered refugee programmes must be increased and special programmes for refugee admission to Canada should be organized. The recent restrictions announced by the Ministry of Manpower and Immigration are callous in the face of a tragic and deteriorating situation.

Fourth and finally, all policies must be based on a deep concern to improve respect for human rights. Governments which systematically torture and kill their citizens will not implement socio-economic development programmes to bring about social justice. Nor can they be trusted to make proper use of development aid.

If Canada intends to assume a leadership role in the North-South dialogue and contribute to long term stability based on social justice, it will have to reformulate its policies in line with the above realities.

by: Liisa North
Associate Professor
Dept. of Political Science

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subversion exported from the Soviet Union via Cuba, but in the distorted nature of Central America's development. While the region's growth rate was rapid until recently, the real incomes of up to three quarters of the population have stagnated so that the distribution of income has become increasingly skewed in favour of upper and middle sectors. Gross inadequacies of nutrition, housing, and medical attention have worsened while land, in spite of pretended land reforms, has been further concentrated in the hands of the few.

The efforts of moderately reformist political parties, unions, peasant associations and clergymen to transform this inequitable order have been brutally repressed. The elites have dug in to defend the status quo and opposition has been driven underground by death squads and military establishments armed and trained by the U.S.

Contrary to U.S. claims, the Central American revolutionary movements are home grown nationalist coalitions which incorporate radical Christians, social democrats and various kinds of Marxists. The local Communist parties are included but they do not dominate these movements.

The revolutionary movements are seeking a profound and urgently needed transformation of the prevailing socio-economic and political order which has been sustained by systematic military repression of the majorities excluded from the benefits of economic growth.

toward peace. Specifically, this requires recognition of the Salvadorean opposition as a representative political force, and strong support for its call for negotiations with the country's ruling regime and the U.S. A stand has to be taken against the U.S. military build up in Honduras, and the arming and training of ex-dictator Somoza's national guard for the violation of Nicaragua's territorial integrity. The U.S. has to be persuaded to negotiate with the Nicaraguan and Cuban governments.

Among others, the governments of France, Mexico and Venezuela have already taken initiatives in the above direction. On August 28, 1981, a French-Mexican communique called for the recognition of Salvadorean revolutionary opposition. Though several Western European governments and the continent's social democratic parties backed the initiative, Canada stayed quietly on

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