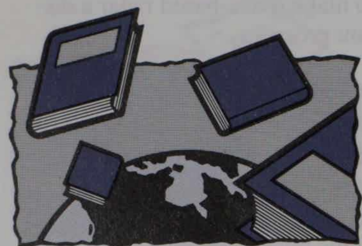
REVIEWS



Arms Canada
Ernie Regehr

Toronto: James Lorimer, 1987, 273 pgs., $15.95 paper

Arms Canada provides a history of Canadian military production, a description of current Canadian government policy and an overview of the decision-making process. Regehr argues that Canadian defence industries support a continental defence system rather than a national one. There is insufficient government procurement of defence products in Canada to sustain the defence industry. Canadian defence industry has therefore survived for the same reason it has developed to its current stage – the industry itself is completely integrated into the US system and relies on US procurement to keep it going.

Faced with the need to conduct trade on a reciprocal basis (Canada must buy from the US an amount equivalent to what it sells there) and increasing Congressional protectionism, Canadian industry is now turning to the Third World market. If Canadian industry and the Canadian government are working to increase arms exports, then important questions need to be asked about the policies governing where those exports go.

Two areas of policy come into play here. Regehr argues that the continental integration of the defence industry has resulted in a substantial loss of Canadian independence in defence policy. "In effect, Canada is a military satellite," he writes. Second, Canada's policy on arms exports to the Third World is on the surface a restrictive one, but, in practice this has not been the case.

Regehr suggests that the restrictions imposed by the government are in fact guidelines rather than binding limits and he gives examples of cases where Canadian arms products have gone to countries guilty of human rights violations and involved in conflicts. According to government policy arms exports to countries falling into either of the above categories are prohibited.

Regehr makes no effort to conceal his position on the issue and the first few chapters suffer from an unnecessary use of expressions such as "international war machine" where "global arms trade" would have sufficed; or, "Canadian naivete" and "apparently boundless innocence" when referring to industry efforts in dealing with the US in the 1950s. Such phrases are likely to put off some readers.

This is an important subject which has been given relatively little attention in Canada. In part this lack of attention or analysis is due to government secrecy on the issue. In *Arms Canada* Ernie Regehr combats this problem by providing a well documented examination of what actually goes on with respect to arms exports.

– Jane Boulden

Ms. Boulden is a former research assistant at the Institute.

Quiet Complicity: Canadian Involvement in the Vietnam War
Victor Levant

Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 1986, 322 pgs., $14.95 paper

During a visit to Washington in March 1969, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau produced a new metaphor for Canadian-American relations. "Living with you," he told the National Press Club, "is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant; no matter how friendly and even-tempered the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt."

Quiet Complicity suggests that Trudeau's metaphor was misplaced – that during the long, sad history of the Vietnam War, Canada was a pretty good elephant itself. Victor Levant, a teacher at John Abbott College in Montreal, has written a book that argues that the large elephant to the south did not use its superior power to push Canada into supporting American policy in Vietnam. Indeed, from 1954 until Saigon's fall in 1975, Ottawa itself not only buttressed Washington's military and diplomatic initiatives in Southeast Asia, but did so with alacrity. Only in the early 1970s, Levant concludes, when a more nationalistic politics emerged in Canada, did the United States find it necessary to exert pressure to keep Ottawa "on side."

Levant defends his thesis by producing evidence to demonstrate a powerful Canadian economic stake in South Vietnam, separate from that of the United States. Where recent scholarship stresses the unimportance of this stake in both countries, Levant takes it seriously, albeit more in symbolic than real terms. Canada, he argues, was less a branch-plant extension of the American economy – less subject, therefore, to Washington's leverage – than an advanced industrial society in its own right. Canadian economic involvement in Southeast Asia generated a singular policy, reflecting in turn the ideological link between the economic interests of the ruling indigenous elite, and the government in Ottawa that represented it.

Levant devotes most of his attention to the role of the Canadian delegation on the International Control Commission, which, he finds, belied Ottawa's claim to impartiality. Canada consistently sided with Saigon and against Hanoi, and systematically violated the Geneva Agreements of 1954. Canadian claims to objectivity were not merely hypocritical; they provided a shrewd shroud for Ottawa's involvement in Washington's strategy of intervention.

Quiet Complicity finds dirty hands everywhere Ottawa engaged itself in Southeast Asia. Throughout both the first Indo-China War and the second, Ottawa remained active in the areas of war production, development assistance, diplomatic support, and intelligence gathering – all in the service of Washington's goals in Vietnam. Levant indicates, for example, that Canada's defence ties with the United States led to plush times in the 1960s for producers of petroleum, copper, nickel, and, especially, arms and munitions. To the author's credit, he has done much homework, a lot, he explains (to the point of special pleading), under establishment duress in both Washington and Ottawa. Indeed, Levant has nothing positive to say about any Canadian leaders – be they elected officials, civil servants, or diplomats. Whether defoliating New Brunswick forests to test agents orange, purple, or blue; allowing B-52 bombers to make practice runs over Saskatchewan and Alberta to perfect carpet-bombing technique; carrying diplomatic messages for, and reporting to, Garcia (the US State Department); or providing developmental aid to Saigon – Ottawa's position was consistently partisan – reflecting its own perceived interests which dovetailed neatly with Washington's.

Levant's book recalls the most polemic of radical historiography that characterized the American debate in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As such, the book encounters problems similar to work by American revisionists like John Gerassi, David Horowitz, and Gar Alperovitz. For one thing, indicating substantial Canadian investment and trade with Southeast Asia does not necessarily prove that Ottawa policy makers defined the national interest in economic terms alone. *Quiet Complicity* assumes but does not demonstrate these links. For another, Levant's own evidence does not establish Ottawa's independence from American pressure.