

Latin America

increase in aid may be on both fronts, both bilaterally as well as through the instrument of the Organization.

Q: That Parliamentary Sub-Committee which you mentioned before on Canada's relations with Latin America and the Caribbean criticized the Reagan Caribbean Basin Plan as "poorly planned and questionably motivated" and this report suggested that Canada should stand aloof, lest it jeopardize Canadian plans for closer relations with the Commonwealth Caribbean. Does that make sense to you?

Mr. McComie: Well, I would say that Canada is much better placed to make some observations about the planning that went into this initiative. And we have to know more about the way in which the Caribbean Basin initiative will operate.

Q: You are in a difficult situation here.

Mr. McComie: In spite of my difficult situation, I will make this comment. It does not seem to me that Canada's own ability to function and to give its assistance on terms that it wants would in any way be impaired by being associated with the other countries in the Caribbean Basin initiative.

Q: I would not be so foolish as to try to get you to comment on the Reagan plan, I was only trying to get what you think is Canada's positioning on this topic. I guess you think that the fear is really not justified.

Mr. McComie: No, I would not say that. That is not the impression. Of course I have to form impressions from what I read that Canadian officials have said. The impression that I get is that even with the reservations that Canadians may have about the way in which the Caribbean Basin initiative was conceived and developed, at the present moment the situation is such that Canada can proceed to deal with the Caribbean Basin and not find that its having been drawn into the initiative is in any way an embarrassment.

Q: Is there resentment within the OAS that Canada's interest in the hemisphere is basically limited to those countries with which it has linguistic and historical ties?

Mr. McComie: No, I do not think that is true as a premise. You see Latin Americans would recognize that the same observation could be made about Spain's relationship with Latin America. If you look at Spain's assistance to the English-speaking Caribbean for example it certainly is minimal compared with what it gives to the Latin American countries. What is important to us is Canada's declaration now of its intention to increase its relationship and to do this in a very concrete way by increasing the amount of assistance that it will devote to Latin America. It does seem to me that Canada is operating on several fronts at the same time and all of these are important to the other parties involved.

Human rights in Latin America

Q: Canada has taken a leading role, as you know, in human rights issues. In fact, that Parliamentary report that we were discussing calls human rights "a Canadian foreign policy asset." A very important part of the OAS is the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. How can Canada in keeping with its own interests step up or increase

its participation in the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights?

Mr. McComie: Well, I am afraid that the Commission itself is confined only to the countries which are members of the Organization, but when the country itself shows by example that it practises what it preaches, then it seems to me that his is the strongest kind of boost that can be given to the whole question of human rights.

Q: In your view, is Canada practising what it preaches when recently in Geneva at a meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Canada abstained from a motion to condemn the state of human rights in El Salvador?

Mr. McComie: I do not think that was the point. From what I read of the essential point in the resolution it seems to me that what the United Nations Human Rights Commission was saying is that there did not exist in El Salvador at the moment a climate which would permit the protection of political and civil rights if an election were held. Now that seems to me to be the kind of situation that gives rise to a difference of opinion.

Q: In an era in which the United States is trying to reduce its own participation in the OAS, to get down from that 66 percent of the budget that it presently underwrites, with Mexico and Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, all trying to draw away to a certain extent, what would be the attraction for Canada? Canada would be one of the fat cats.

Mr. McComie: (Laughs) Well, again I do not wish to speak for Canada but it does seem to me that the increasing involvement of Canada with the programs of the OAS and the decision to use the OAS as a vehicle through which to help other countries does indicate that Canada sees something of value in maintaining this very close relationship. Whether it will either move to the status of full member or not is a decision for the Canadian Government, but I must say that there is a great deal of expectancy among the other members of the OAS because their attitude is this, that if without being a member Canada is such a useful adjunct to the Organization what would it be like if it were a full member?

Q: Mr. McComie, if you were the Secretary General of the Organization as many people believe you have every chance of becoming in the next few years and, along with that, if there were either an English-speaking majority or English-speaking parity within the Organization so that there would be significant confidence and brotherhood within the Organization and ability for you to get votes when you needed votes, how would the Organization change; specifically, would it be as passive and muscle-bound as it has been regarding conflicts in the hemisphere?

Mr. McComie: The thrust of your question seems to suggest that the Secretary General has a great deal of influence in determining what the policies of the Organization will be so we must lay that one to rest. The fact of the matter is that this Organization will only do what the member governments want it to do. If at any time public opinion feels the Organization is lethargic or that it is not involved in the major issues of the hemisphere, the answer is that that is exactly what the members think it should be doing. □