

## Principal Power, eh?

a degree influenced by the picture of Canada disseminated by their media.

### Watching *The Times* and *Le Monde*

In an attempt to establish the contemporary images of Canada in its mother countries over the first six months of 1987, the author systematically analyzed on a daily basis *The Times* of London and *Le Monde* of Paris, not only for their coverage of Canada, but of all states in the international system. These papers were selected on the grounds that as capital city, elite newspapers, they could be expected to provide as full or fuller coverage of Canadian affairs as any other dailies within the two countries. For the purposes of comparing coverage of Canada with the rest of the world, the front and back pages and the inside foreign news pages of each issue were examined and a country was counted as a subject in a story when at least one paragraph of the item dealt with that particular state.

Over the study period, there were 5,594 stories in *The Times* and 4,502 in *Le Monde* dealing with the affairs of other countries. Of these, 66 (or 1.18 percent) dealt with Canada in *The Times* and 49 (1.09 percent) in *Le Monde*. This meant that Canada ranked 29th (tied with New Zealand and Turkey) in frequency of coverage in *The Times* and 35th in *Le Monde*. In *The Times* Canada fell just behind Zimbabwe (79 stories), Belgium (73) and Bangladesh (68), and just ahead of Argentina (63), Fiji (63) and Egypt (61), while in *Le Monde* it was behind Austria (54), Chile (52) and Sri Lanka (52), and just ahead of Vietnam (48), Ireland (45) and Peru (44). Clearly, in both papers Canada tended to be clustered with small or middle powers. By comparison, the United States, the most frequently discussed country in each paper, appeared in 1,326 stories in *The Times* (23.7 percent) and 893 (19.8 percent) in *Le Monde*, and the Soviet Union, the second most commonly reported country, in 717 stories in the former (12.8 percent) and 757 (16.8 percent) in the latter. West Germany ranked third in *The Times* (379 stories or 6.8 percent) and Iran in *Le Monde* (326 or 7.2 percent).

The frequency with which a state is discussed in the press is, of course, not alone an adequate measure of how its power and status are seen, for there is a natural tendency to focus on those countries, small or powerful, that are at the center of international controversy and to give less space to stable states not embroiled in conflict. That it received sparse attention is to some degree to Canada's credit, and the fact that countries such as Iran, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Libya and South Africa were accorded substantially greater coverage in both papers probably does not indicate so much that they were deemed more powerful or more important than Canada, but simply that they were seen as more newsworthy by a press preoccupied with violence and political conflict.

### Curious discrimination

Nevertheless, even allowing for this characteristic of the press, Canada was relatively neglected, for a number of states, by any objective measure less powerful than Canada and at the same time not noted for being enmeshed in major domestic and international conflicts, obtained greater attention. In the case of *The Times*, these countries included: Spain (196 stories), Italy (151), Australia (132), Greece (92), the Vatican (81), Zimbabwe (79) and Belgium (73), and in *Le Monde*: Italy (129), Spain (127), Poland (107), Algeria (94), the Vatican (80), Tunisia (77), Turkey (70), Argentina (59), Morocco (55) and Austria (54).

Another way of highlighting Canada's under-representation is to compare its coverage with that of the other members of the Group of Seven Western economic powers, since Canada's participation in that club is often cited as evidence of its great power status. In fact, in both papers, it received only about one-twentieth the coverage of the United States, one-sixth that of West Germany, one-fifth the coverage of France in *The Times*, one-quarter that of Britain in *Le Monde* and less than half the coverage of Italy and Japan in both papers.

Looking at Canada in the context of NATO powers, in *The Times* it ranked eighth in frequency of treatment and in *Le Monde* seventh. While both papers exhibited a general tendency to report the affairs of their countries' former colonies, Canada was once again relatively overlooked when coverage was compared from this angle. In *The Times*, seven former British colonies received more extensive coverage than Canada (South Africa, India, Australia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and Bangladesh), as did four former French possessions in *Le Monde* (Chad, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco). From a variety of perspectives, then, it is clear that in terms of frequency of coverage Canada was placed with middle and small powers rather than with the major players in the international system.

### Story content

An examination of the items in *The Times* and *Le Monde* dealing specifically with Canada provides supporting evidence for the view that the press of the two mother countries has a conservative conception of Canada's position in the world and a tendency to reinforce traditional, often negative, images of the country.

When all pages of each paper were analyzed for items pertaining to Canada, 121 stories were compiled from *The Times* and 105 from *Le Monde*. While this might at first appear to indicate relatively satisfactory coverage (on average one item roughly every one-and-a-half days), it is noteworthy that over 50 percent of the items in both papers were brief (i.e., between one and five paragraphs in length) and less than 7 and 8 percent respectively were long (over fifteen paragraphs), analytical (as opposed to factual, hard news) stories. Further, items on Canada were rarely located prominently in either paper. Only three stories made it to the front page of *The Times*. One pertained to the discovery of an unidentified stash of \$3 million in three suitcases in the waiting-room of a British Columbia hospital, another to the engagement of the Earl of St. Andrews to a Canadian, and the third was a 3-paragraph reference (in a much longer article on the G-7 meeting in Venice) to Prime Minister Mulroney's hope for a separate statement from the conference on the South African situation. *Le Monde* had only four front page items, but they were more serious and detailed. Two pertained to President François Mitterrand's 1977 official visit to Canada, and two to the conclusion of the Meech Lake constitutional accord. Neither paper had a single editorial or Letter to the Editor related to Canada.

Stories were predominantly in the inside foreign news pages, although a good deal of *The Times'* Canadian coverage (19.8 percent) was in its sports section. Curiously, more of these stories pertained to rugby than anything else — reports (largely of defeats) of touring Canadian teams, an odd image of Canada's place in international sport. Hockey, skiing, the impending Calgary Olympics and the snooker exploits of Cliff Thorburn — probably the best known Canadian in Britain — were, however,