

International

Canada writes off £300 million of African debts

Canada has taken action to assist debt burdened Third World countries that are facing endemic balance of payments problems and declining prices for their exports. Canada's initiative is intended to assist these countries to undertake longer-term economic adjustment programmes.

At the Francophone summit held in Quebec last September, several African leaders reiterated calls for measures to alleviate the precarious financial situation of their countries.

The Canadian government reacted soon afterwards with an announcement by External Affairs Minister Joe Clark that £147 million of debts owed by Senegal, Zaire, Madagascar, Cameroon, the Congo, the Ivory Coast and Gabon would be written off.

An additional £165 million was written off by Canada at the Commonwealth summit in Vancouver the following month. This time the beneficiaries were six Commonwealth African countries. Canadian officials hope that their action will prompt other developed countries to make similar gestures to relieve the debt burden on the world's poorest nations.

Canada also plans to make a substantial contribution to the International Monetary Fund to support the structural adjustment measures which the Fund negotiates with poor countries.

Economy

Forecasters optimistic about Canada's economic prospects

Canada is set to enjoy above-average economic growth over the next 18 months, while medium-term prospects for the economy also look favourable. This is the view of a number of leading economic institutions.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), for instance, has noted that Canada's output showed the fastest growth of any large industrial country last year.

Unemployment fell to 9.6%, and next year it is expected to fall below 9%. The OECD also predicts economic growth of between 2.5% and 3% — a figure which is confirmed by the Conference Board of Canada.

At the same time, EuroRatings Ltd, Europe's only international full-service rating agency, has announced that it has assigned its highest investment grade (AAA) to several long-term obligations of the Canadian government. This is a reflection of Canada's wealth of natural resources, its highly developed manufacturing industry and its sophisticated services sector.

Medium-term prospects for the Canadian economy are favourable, according to EuroRatings. Output will expand with falling inflation, the balance of payments deficit will narrow, and there will be a further reduction in the federal budget deficit.

Trade

Canadian wheat exports top 21 million tonnes

Canada's wheat exports are running at a rate of close to 21 million tonnes per year and account for nearly one quarter of world grain exports. This is a 40% increase over Canada's share of the market five years ago.

The United States remains the largest wheat exporter with 30% of the world market, but Canada in second place is cutting the American lead. In fact, the Canadian share of the world wheat market is growing faster than any other country's despite intense competition.

However, the Canadian Wheat Board 'has been obliged to match the very low prices being offered



His Excellency Roy McMurtry, Canadian High Commissioner, and to his right, Mr Garde Gardom, Agent General for British Columbia, discuss existing dispatch systems for Dial-a-Cab prior to MDI signing.

by the US and other suppliers in order to stay in the market,' says Wheat Council spokesman Bill Demaria. As a result, farmers are receiving the lowest prices for seven years.

Business

London's cabbies choose Canadian taxi dispatch system

A Vancouver-based firm, Mobile Data International, has broken new ground by selling its computerised taxi dispatch system to one of London's largest taxi companies, Owner-Drivers Radio Taxi Service Ltd — better known as Dial-a-Cab. It will be the largest such system in the world, and the first one in the UK.

The heart of the system is a radio modem which transmits digital data on radio waves. Each of the cabs will be equipped with a keyboard and small computer

screen which is able to display up to 320 characters on ten lines. It represents an improvement over radio voice communication from the standpoint both of accuracy and speed of transmission.

The search for a suitable system lasted two years, according to Dial-a-Cab's Chairman, Ken Burns. During that time, he and his members studied numerous systems and visited a number of Mobile Data's customers in North America. One of these was the Houston Yellow Cab Company which has 1300 vehicles fitted with terminals, just short of Dial-a-Cab's 1420.

Mobile Data International's sales in 1986 topped £15 million with a current workforce of 350. One of its first customers was the Vancouver Police Force back in 1979. Having signed the £2.7 million deal with Dial-a-Cab, which includes a five-year maintenance contract, this innovative hi-tech company is turning its attention to other parts of the lucrative, but discriminating, European market.

Trends

Canada's population continues to grow despite lower birth rate. Canada's population is still increasing, but at a slower rate than in the past, according to the

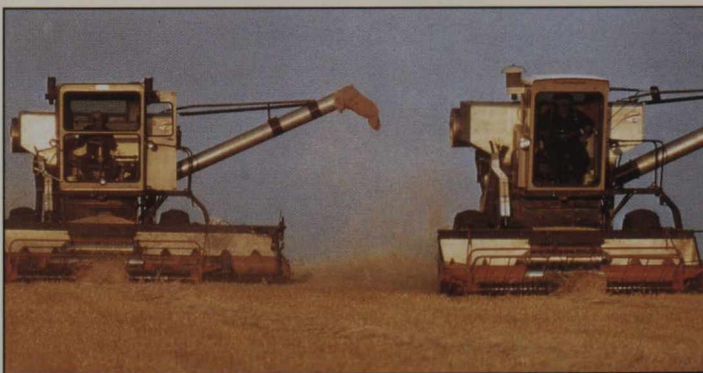


Photo: National Film Board