

Canadians serving abroad seem more confident of their identity than those who stay at home, while foreigners who deal with Canadians in international organizations, or in conferences such as the one on European security and co-operation, rarely express doubts about Canada's independence. The country enjoys a good reputation, often better than it deserves, and few if any foreign governments have inhibitions about increasing their relations with it.

Form and substance

The Third Option, however, is not without difficulty or danger. We can expect understanding for our "American Problem", but hardly sympathy. Canada's general position is already the object of widespread envy. The onus is on Canadians to demonstrate that increased relations would be in the interest of the other nations. That calls for initiative, in business as well as governmental circles, and difficult choices. The principal alternative markets to the United States are in the European Community and Japan, but neither is interested in arrangements that would seriously complicate their relations with the United States, and both are more single-minded than the United States in their interest in Canadian raw materials, as opposed to the manufactured goods that we prefer to export. Many Canadian decision-makers say they favour preferential trading arrangements with Europe, but the enthusiasm tends to vary inversely with the person's experience in international commerce.

The Third Option sometimes appears to have more to do with form than substance and Canada could easily become as boring as the West Germans were during the years their diplomats had to bear the cross of the Hallstein Doctrine. Canadians used to be heeded in international forums on the assumption they were among the likeliest to produce ideas of general relevance. Now one hears the occasional complaint that an upraised Canadian hand is the signal to tune out, that the intervention seems altogether too likely to consist of special pleading and to be concerned more with the Canadian right to be invited, heard and mentioned in communiqués than with the issues at stake as perceived by all the other participants. The complaint may not be warranted. It certainly is not true of Canada's contribution in some current negotiations, such as those on the law of the sea. But the risk is undeniable and one finds disconcerting uncertainty about Canada's intentions among both Canadian representatives and foreign observers.

Intensified relations with Third World countries are appealing for reasons that go well beyond the Third Option. Recent statements by Prime Minister Trudeau and other ministers have been noted with appreciation in the poorer countries, and there is no reason to question our leaders' good intentions. Doubts do exist, however, about the likelihood of Canada measuring up to the expectations created by Mr. Trudeau's rhetoric. Canada's performance in the tariff negotiations in Geneva, for example, or in the Conference on the Law of the Sea, is better than that of some other developed countries, but falls far short of the response implied by Canada's statements about the New Economic Order. Countries like the Netherlands and Sweden are now seen as more sympathetic than Canada to the aspirations of the developing peoples.

It was suggested earlier that Canada's interest would be ill-served by an interpretation of the Third Option that excluded further co-operation with the United States in such forms as free trade. An additional danger is that it will be interpreted as anti-American. Indeed, this is already the case in some circles. My primary worry is not the possibility of American retaliation; even though I have less confidence that the anti-American Canadian nationalists in the inexhaustibility of American goodwill towards Canada, my main concern is about the further harm that might be done to the global image of the United States or the encouragement of isolationist tendencies within that country. The United States, at least in the eyes of the Canadians with the greatest first-hand experience, has treated Canada with respect and generosity. The positive features of the relation far outweigh the negative. That has not been true of American relations with all other countries, and the painful exposure of abuses through the workings of the American democratic process is producing salutary change. The process will have gone too far, however, if it causes Americans to lose all confidence and self-respect, if they abandon the good things they have been doing in the world along with the bad.

Canadians sharing a continent with a benevolent giant are rightly concerned about their identity and independence. It is not in Canada's interest, however, to have the relationship misconceived abroad. The United States has been a good friend to Canada. That is what most of us believe. We should not encourage the world to think otherwise.

Generosity and respect have marked United States treatment of Canada