

*External Aid*

given great weight but this was counterbalanced by other valid Canadian concerns, such as trade in peaceful goods. Thus, there has not been a total rupture of the bilateral relationship on the economic side, but government facilities and mechanisms are no longer used. Whether in either case the action we have taken will be persuasive in promoting greater respect for human rights is a question which we will have to examine over a certain time frame and in the light of the parallel actions of others, and even then the answer is likely to be inconclusive and highly subjective.

● (1732)

In the multilateral field Canada takes account of human rights considerations if these figure in a specific project proposal by one of the development banks. We have, however, resisted efforts by others to apply the performance of governments in human rights as a general yardstick for the acceptability of a given development project, since we consider it essential to preserve the abilities of these institutions to function effectively in the development field.

Those of us who live in countries of western traditions frequently assume that those standards of conduct and behaviour towards our fellow man which we traditionally favour are also perceived as having equal validity by other governments. But the perspective of other countries is, in fact, often different, partly because they may not be western or democratic in background or partly because their economic situations are vastly different from ours.

Thus, western democracies traditionally accord priority to civil and political rights, while Third World countries often place their emphasis on pressing economic needs. We are told regularly in international bodies that a majority of underdeveloped states are more concerned with alleviating starvation and promoting their development and, in so doing, attach a greater priority to the duties of citizens than to their rights.

In the absence of consensus and of effective enforcement machinery at the international level, therefore, we have been forced to rely on other methods, essentially political and diplomatic, to convey to other governments our concerns about human rights. Canada can use multilateral bodies such as the Commission on Human Rights to make known our attitude toward events in other countries. At such meetings we can vote on resolutions varying in tone and substance from mild requests for information to denunciations and condemnations. Multilateral bodies may impose sanctions dealing with aid or trade in specific types of goods or trade generally. Such sanctions may be legally binding, as are Security Council sanctions, or voluntary, as are resolutions of the General Assembly. States may, of course, impose sanctions unilaterally or jointly with other states by curtailing aid, ending trade relations or by going as far as suspending diplomatic relations.

We can also make direct representations on a bilateral basis. Such representations may range from expressions of concern through requests for redress of specific grievances to formal protests.

[Mr. Robinson.]

Canadians are justifiably indignant at flagrant abuses of the fundamental rights of the individual in countries such as Uganda, South Africa and in many other countries in eastern Europe, Latin America and elsewhere, and we have sought to express this concern in the manner we believe is most effective. Nevertheless, there are no firm and fixed rules for raising and discussing what are essentially the domestic concerns of other states. Some countries simply refuse categorically to permit any exchange of views.

When we approach the issue of raising human rights questions with other countries, we generally consider two criteria in deciding a course of action. The first is whether an action would be appropriate. The second is what action will likely be effective. Whether action, if taken, will be effective has to be subjected to balanced and careful examination.

When we have cordial relations with states, for example, low key, private discussions are demonstrably more likely to resolve outstanding individual difficulties. This, in turn, can establish an atmosphere in which it should be easier for us to seek to have resolved other problems of concern to Canadians. When relations are poor and progress on human rights issues is negligible, it may be necessary to make our case public, even though public pressure may as often contribute to a hardening of attitudes as to a meeting of minds. Whether a given course of action will be effective depends as well on our ultimate goals. If we seek to rectify isolated abuses or aberrations in a state's normal performance in the human rights field, the task is generally manageable. We are not, however, likely to be able to alter a firm policy or the fundamental basis of another state's society or political system, certainly neither easily nor quickly.

The intent of this bill, that of seeking to guarantee a positive commitment to traditional and fundamental human rights, is one to which this government wholeheartedly subscribes. It is one which we have consistently promoted in all international forums, most recently at the Commission on Human Rights which has just concluded its thirty-fourth session in Geneva.

Nevertheless, it is our belief that, if adopted, this bill would distort the aims and purposes of Canadian international development assistance. This bill would make the conduct of Canadian policy in the fields of development assistance and export financing hostage to only one factor, human rights, a factor which is largely beyond our control.

Canada's external relations are and must be governed by, and responsive to, many variables. They cannot and must not be conditioned by the type of rigid, essentially one track framework contemplated by this bill. When the totality of any of our bilateral relationships is considered, only in rare cases would human rights violations by themselves be sufficient reason to withdraw Canadian support. The judgment called for even in such cases is a difficult one, necessitating the weighing of all the various factors involved in our relationships and a determination of the relative importance of the human rights parameter.

Any hypothetical moral suasion or pressure provided by implementation of the provisions of this bill to improve the