

Letters to the Editor

Sir,

In his thoughtful review of *Canada and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (International Perspectives May/June 1986)*, David Lord dwelt on the conference rather than the Canadian participation and assessment. A reader might mistakenly conclude that the Canadian negotiators shared his negative appraisal of the conference outcome, and also his view that for Canada it was "at best a lot of hard diplomatic slogging. . .to even play a marginal role."

In fact the Canadian diplomats believed that the Helsinki Final Act (1975) represented a triumph for mankind, and that the Soviet Union had been conceded nothing of consequence. Moreover, Canada's role, in the eyes of the Canadian negotiators, was anything but "marginal." Rather they saw themselves as the most effective of the hard-line delegations in maintaining Western solidarity and squeezing every possible concession out of the Warsaw Pact participants.

I have never heard of a Canadian delegation that was more cohesive, spirited, innovative and tough. Having

served in External for a few years during the time Canada specialized in playing a moderator role, I was startled by the combative tone of many of the communications in the files, and by my interviews with the Canadian negotiators.

Why the apparent reversal in roles from alliance moderator to alliance militant? Partly it was opportunity. The Americans, concentrating on their bilateral talks with the Kremlin, were not taking the CSCE seriously. The Germans seemed confused by conflicting instructions from Bonn. The French, clearly the Western leader on some issues, often angered their allies by playing their own games with the Soviets. A partial vacuum in leadership thus existed, which the Canadians helped to fill.

Partly the role shift resulted from a determination to regain Canada's standing among its European allies, standing that had been seriously damaged by Trudeau's unilateral cut in our forces based in Europe. Our diplomats made the most of the Geneva session of the CSCE (1973-5) to demonstrate that we were ardent and effective

champions of West European interests and hence useful participants in future European conferences. In negotiating about borders, for example, the Canadians were at times more German than the Germans; Bonn was also grateful for Canada's leadership in the family reunification issue. Furthermore, Canadian politicians saw in Canada's active, tough diplomacy an excellent means to placate Canadians of East European background, many of whom had been offended by Trudeau's apparent indifference to human rights in the Soviet bloc.

Even if one shared Lord's skepticism about the ultimate achievement of the CSCE, it should be recognized that the Canadian role in negotiating the Helsinki Final Act served admirably the goals that the Canadians had set for themselves. I am uneasy about the shift in roles, but I doubt whether the files will reveal many cases where Canadian conference diplomacy has been as skillful or successful.

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