

membership in the Organization of American States (OAS), where Ottawa's symbolic "empty chair" has been much talked about but never used.

True, the OAS was aptly described by former Secretary General Alejandro Orfila as a "pachyderm," given its slow-moving and patronage-ridden bureaucracy; yet its role as a hemispheric forum is nowhere near dead, especially since the emergence of Caribbean nations as a "third bloc." Stevens's view remains sound nonetheless, particularly as Canadian membership could well provide Ottawa with the public springboard and the private channels to voice a North American policy perspective that is distinct from and far more conciliatory than that of the United States. In its best tradition, Ottawa could play honest broker in the backroom discussions that affect a crisis such as that of Central America.

The problem may well be that the Progressive Conservatives may not be able to disentangle themselves from the Reagan-Thatcher Tory axis. After the spring visit by Members of Parliament to Managua, the delegation seemed to bring back precisely the sort of gloom that would

encourage at least a rhetorical reversal, from the ambiguous concern of the Trudeau era for the Central American power keg to an explicit support for the Pentagon's designs.

The New Democratic Party's emergence by default as the leading opposition, if a development that by numbers alone remains pro forma, may bode well for the development of coherent, principled and concrete initiatives. When it comes to substance, the NDP has shown itself capable of rising above the dreary laissez-faire of the past. Ed Broadbent repeatedly pressed the Liberals to voice consternation in the face of US-sponsored militarization of the region. His colleagues can be expected to make their human rights concerns heard, if not always followed.

Canadians, in any case, are daily becoming more sensitized to the issues and the stakes involved, as the wave of protests following the US-led invasion of Grenada demonstrated. Canadians do not want to be merely spectators of horrors in a difficult world, even if they realize they are unlikely to shape its ultimate destiny. Canada, with its reputation untarnished by interventionism, could make a decisive contribution as a broker and as a retardant of new US military adventures. □

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