

policy responses are produced together contribute to the erosion of the chain of accountability that is the central feature of any established system of responsible government. Over the long haul, this may pose a serious threat to a type of political regime that it has taken thousands of years to create, and that flourishes even now in only a small part of the globe.

### Principle level

But the dimensions of the problem go well beyond the level of mere managerial and technical difficulty. They appear also at the level of principle, and in the current context are raised in their most obvious form by the widely-expressed demands for the creation of a "New International Economic Order". Such demands aggravate the situation because they entail a series of claims that are fundamentally at odds with the conviction that the domestic constituency is the community to which political leaders in a parliamentary system are ultimately responsible. In short, it attacks the very foundations of the nation state.

This is not an original observation, but it serves to remind us that thus far in the Western liberal tradition, with its deeply-ingrained conception of the social contract, no satisfactory political or constitutional principle for dealing with the needs of the global community has been developed. The essential premise of the liberal-democratic state is that political leaders and their advisers are in office to serve the interests of their constituents, and the central object of liberal constitutions is to establish mechanisms for ensuring that, within reasonable limits, this responsibility will be met. Underlying the argument for a New International Economic Order, however, is the expectation that policy-makers will in some measure be as responsive to the welfare of peoples *outside* their national boundaries as to the welfare of the peoples within – an expectation that derives from new conditions of global interdependence that could hardly have been envisaged by the political theorists of the seventeenth century. The conflict of principles that results is direct and inescapable.

Thus far, it would appear that the difficulty has been evaded by resort to one or more of three basic strategies, all of which have been very evident in the history of debates on "foreign aid" and "development assistance". The first such strategy (if it can be justly called so) has consisted in a *de facto* refusal to take the principle of international equity seriously at all – whenever, at least, it is recognized that doing so would seriously jeopardize a domestic constituency interest.

If this were done openly, it would amount to declaring in simple and explicit terms the primacy of the principle of responsible government as embodied in the nation-state construct. In practice, however, this would amount to a wholesale repudiation of competing, and very powerful, "Samaritanesque" principles of private morality – a repudiation that policy-makers and their publics alike, to their credit, find it difficult to contemplate. The result, therefore, is a continuing obfuscation of the issues, often with the help of arguments that obscure the underlying question of principle by focusing on problems of practical implementation (e.g., emphasizing the limited "absorptive capacity" of potential recipients).

The second strategy for coping with the conflict is to argue that redistributive programs are as much in the interests of the "donor" as of the recipient, and hence that no significant trade-off of "domestic" and "foreign" welfare is really involved. Suggestions, for example, that development-assistance is an effective mechanism for promoting exports, or winning diplomatic friends or maintaining international stability over the long term fall into this general category.

The third strategy for resolving the problem – most frequently observable in cases of apparently unadulterated altruism (e.g., disaster relief) – is to argue that the act of national self-abnegation is based on an implied, understood, or sometimes even explicit, constituency instruction. Here the policy-maker's dilemma is resolved by the claim that while he is in some measure promoting the welfare of "foreigners" at the expense of his own citizens, he does so with the latter's authorization.

### General limits

Clearly the effect of the first of the three strategies has been to establish general limits on the degree of genuine wealth-transfer that the developed states have been prepared to consider. Even so, the second and third strategies have thus far done reasonably well in Canada (they have been less successful in the United States) in sustaining a significantly-expanded program of external assistance. In this, they have been greatly assisted by the fact that very few Canadians are sufficiently attentive to the details of the program to understand how large it actually is, or to observe in any direct way such linkages as might exist between the government's collective "sacrifice", on the one hand, and their own individual sacrifices, on the other.

To put the point another way, the complexity of the debate itself makes it very