

## Human rights need aid

### A closer look

Let us review some of the more common arguments put forward against direct "aid/rights" linkage. First, there is the contention that human rights are exceedingly difficult to define since they mean different things in different societies. But surely the relevant benchmark is the commonality of *free* societies. Their institutions and processes will naturally differ, but what they clearly share are the basic individual freedoms in a pluralistic system of due process and elected government. Unlike beauty, fundamental human rights are not in the eye of the beholder.

Secondly, there is the argument that aid donors have no business infringing on recipients' sovereignty by making such transfers conditional on social, economic or political performance. This is patent nonsense. The potential for socio-economic gains in the receiving country is widely accepted as a major determinant of aid-giving. There is no *a priori* reason why donors should not seek the enhancement of liberty as well.

Nor is it convincing to argue that a human rights test adds unmanageable complexity to the task of gauging the effectiveness of economic aid. The criteria for judgment are already numerous, varied and complex. If human rights are a significant element of Canadian foreign policy, there is no logical way of avoiding their inclusion in the aid-evaluation process.

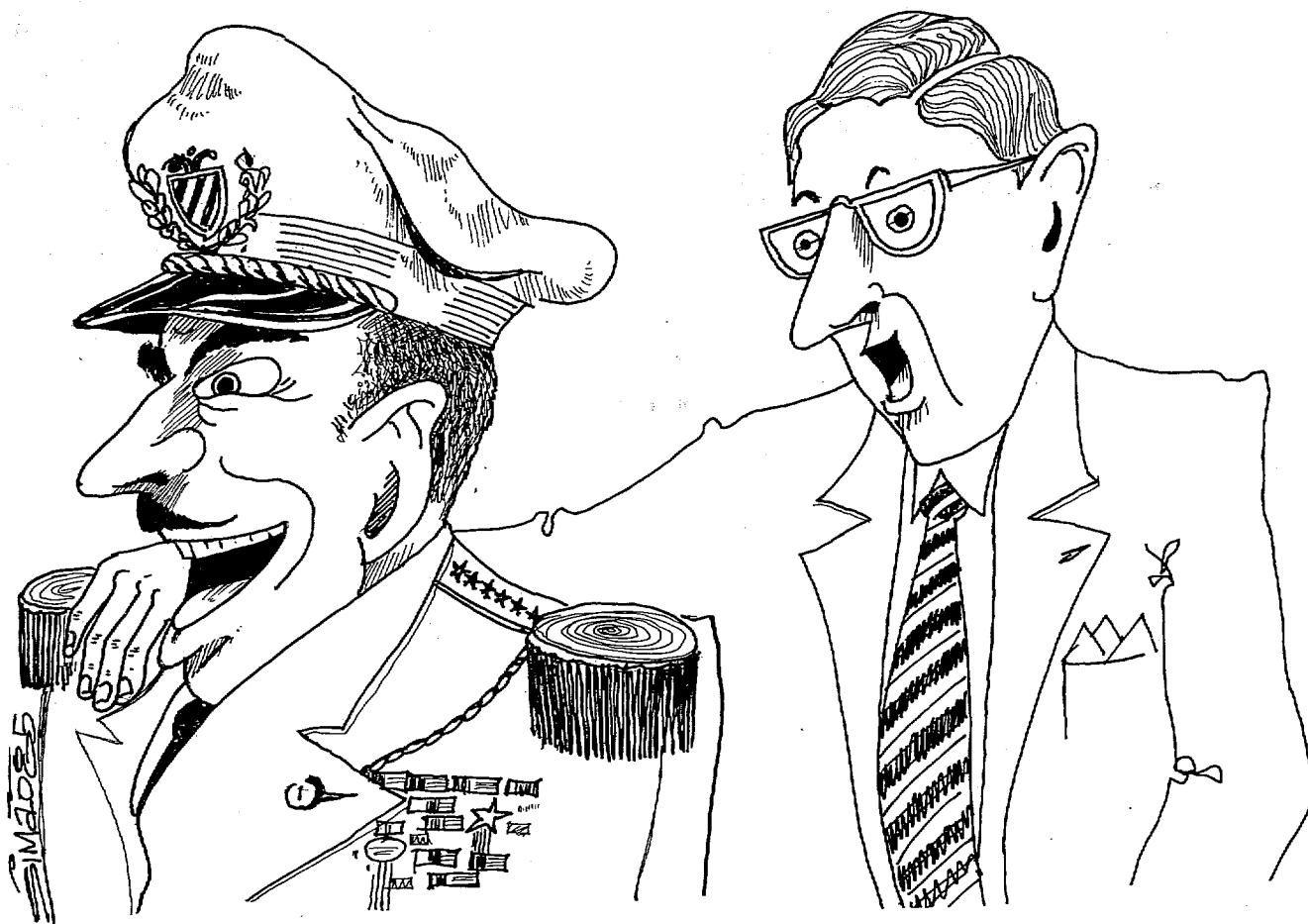
Logic does not, however, require that human rights generally be traded off against economic development.

Saying, over and over again, that rapid growth in most Third World countries is incompatible with Western-style governance does not make it so. What experience does tell us is that authoritarianism is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for economic development. We also know that Western democratic values — notably individual freedom and broad-based decision-making — can be powerful instruments for socio-economic progress. And we know that corrupt authoritarian regimes in the developing countries have often blunted the stimulus which foreign aid was intended to provide. (Corruption may, of course, coexist with human rights. This speaks for more careful aid appraisal, not against aid/rights linkage.)

### No need to abandon the poorest

A related argument is that a larger human rights dimension in aid policy would exacerbate world poverty since so much of it prevails in non-democratic countries. To some extent, this is a spurious line of reasoning. Consider, for example, the unanimity of approval that would probably attach to the withdrawal of Canadian assistance from genocidal Cambodia-type regimes, no matter how extreme the poverty. Consider also the possibility of more concentrated, and more effective, aid going to low income democracies. But such contingencies aside, probing head-on for human rights does not mean opting out of generous relief for Ethiopia-type disasters (assuming reasonably effective delivery systems); even freedom is no match for nature

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