

Some authorities advance a political rationale for aid programmes. This is that provision of funds and assistance, by reducing hunger and misery, has a stabilizing effect in the poorer countries since the people will have fewer issues to fight about. For my part, I find this hard to accept and repugnant in some of its aspects. First, world history makes it abundantly clear that populations kept at or below the subsistence level lack the physical, mental and spiritual strength to organize and carry through effective action, political or violent. Successful revolt, like successful government, calls for effective infrastructure, the kind of thing aid programmes are designed to provide. My second point about this theory raises one of the perennial political problems about development assistance. The assumption that the developed nations' interests are served best by maintaining the status quo through the judicious supply of aid is both arrogant and unfounded. There are countries where one can only hope that in due time the development assistance they receive from us and from others will give to the people the sinews they need to rise and cast aside the cruel weight of unjust and unprincipled government. At the same time, if we have the vision to look ahead decades rather than years, we can see the unrest that rising expectations can breed as a transitional period leading eventually to a stabler and more prosperous world.

Another justification for development-assistance programmes is that they contribute to a sense of national self-esteem and thus to a sense of national unity and identity. Again, this is hard to quantify. I believe it would be difficult to take pride in a country that failed to pull its weight in this field. If we can't take pride in our country, then we cannot have the sense of community and common purpose that is the only healthy foundation for nationhood.

Canada's first efforts in the field of international assistance were devoted to the reconstruction of Britain and Europe after the Second World War. At this time, Canada was second only to the United States as a source of economic assistance to the rest of the world. A major motivation for this activity was probably a sense of indebtedness for the sacrifices Europe had made during the war and a desire to have Europe strengthened to avoid further hostilities over control of its industry and resources.

Our first aid initiative, in the true sense of the term, was a contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for the relief of refugees in the Middle East. The major motivation behind this was probably the desire to reduce political and social tensions in that area at a time when cold war tensions were rising and when we were still living in the aftermath of the Second World War.

The Colombo Plan, established in 1950, was the first aid programme in which Canada took part in the basic planning. Our motivations were probably varied in nature. We had an interest in helping the newly-independent nations of southern Asia take their place in the Commonwealth and we wanted to help alleviate the grinding poverty found in that part of the world. More practical considerations came into play, the need to reduce the dollar gap by infusing dollars into the sterling area and the need to strengthen Southeast Asia in the face of the threat posed by the outbreak of war in Korea.

The evolution of the Canadian development assistance programme since the early 1950s has followed the momentum and pattern of events in the underdeveloped world. As Britain's colonial empire was dissolved by the granting of constitutions to colonies all over the world, the new nations that came into being were included in the Canadian assistance programme.