

Contadora needs Canada

Nicaragua. Canada condemned the mining of Nicaraguan ports, which put at peril at least one Canadian vessel. Yet Ottawa has yet to establish a diplomatic presence that could be effective in helping to channel dialogue between Managua and Washington. Disillusionment after a spring 1984 trip by several members of Parliament should not stand in the way; certainly, Canada has helped Third World members of the Commonwealth whose politics were not always pleasing.

El Salvador. As pointed out in several major editorials in Canada, the Canadian observer status during last year's election — which served to legitimate Washington policy — was less than helpful. President Jose Napoleon Duarte's electoral campaign was later found to have been funded with CIA monies laundered via the West German Christian Democratic Party — hardly a surprise given the long history of CIA-CD links in Latin America. Duarte, purportedly the healer of a country suffering an on-going civil war, also has less than a pristine record when it comes to human rights — witness several well-publicized assassinations of North Americans.

Costa Rica. Ottawa has no closer parallel in the region than the government of San Jose, neutral and de-militarized since 1948. It would serve the cause of both to seek a common front. Costa Rica has been besieged by unasked-for offers of military aid from Washington, and has been saved from yielding to those inducements by a hair's breadth.

Honduras and Guatemala. Both seek to remain uninvolved, yet their governments are both pliable and weak. Canada should exercise extreme caution towards Guatemala, which since 1954 has been experiencing rebellion. The Honduran armed forces are already unsettled by non-stop US military "exercises," and a friendly voice could help Tegucigalpa reconsider its current position as base of operations for an expanding US presence.

Overcoming history

Towards the end of the Trudeau era, Ottawa seemed to espouse a two-track policy towards Central America that even its exponents found hard to explain. Partly, the shapers of policy were caught in the bleak history of tenuous relations with Central America and, beyond that specific area, the hemisphere as a whole. It is, of course, a truism to say that Canada does not think of itself as part of the Americas. Canadian journalist Knowlton Nash more than a decade ago offered the most memorable appraisal of this state of affairs when he wrote that "Canada acts like a reluctant virgin fearful of losing her purity to the seductive Latins."

Little has changed from Van Horne's modest trading with Guatemala in the 19th century to the days of Canadian nuclear technology transfers to Argentina. Latin Americanists such as John Harbron have persistently noted that Canada shares with many Latin nations the challenge of exploring and developing vast untapped natural resources. Also, if Canadians have had to cope with the mammoth to their south, Latin Americans have had to learn to live with the power to their north.

Yet in its behavior towards Latin America, Canada has often acted as little more than a mercantile appendage of the United States. Canada-Latin America relations never

acquired the bitterness brought about by US hegemony, but even up to recent times Ottawa has acted as if it saw the region merely as a market for surplus goods, unconnected to the policy implications of a trading relationship. (The exception to the pattern was provided by the then-romantic, proto-Québécois movement in the 1930s, in which figures such as the *patriote* Henri Bourassa went so far as to suggest a cultural and political alliance between the Latin people of his province and those south of the Rio Grande.)

On the whole the motivation for relations was purely commercial. Economist Jean-Michel Houde had estimated that toward the early 1970s, before policy links began to diversify, even Canadian aid was directed more by the goal of export promotion than by a concern for development — as witnessed by requirements that as much as two-thirds of purchases made with such funds be Canadian products, a policy that did change, but that underscores the early impetus of the Canadian outlook.

Trudeau takes first steps

Oddly, in view of later events, it was Pierre Trudeau who first attempted to enlarge the vistas of Canadian development assistance and trade, qualitatively as well as quantitatively. Canada stepped beyond the Commonwealth relation with the Caribbean and in 1971 took the quantum leap of joining the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Within a few years European nations and Japan followed Canada's lead. In the first two years of Canadian membership in the IDB, Ottawa's aid to the region doubled to \$13.07 million.

Despite movement in a new direction, the old quandary resurfaced forcibly in July 1981, when Canada announced the sale of 1,000 fuel-rods to Argentina for use in the Canadian-built CANDU nuclear facility — a lucrative but questionable deal. Argentina was then under a military regime whose human rights abuses had claimed many thousands of civilian lives. Argentine Vice Admiral Carlos Castro Madero, then-head of the country's nuclear program stated that his country would begin nuclear research. As in the more recent cases of Honduras and Guatemala, Mr. Trudeau had authorized the shipment over the objections of labor unions and opposition, which opposed the move on human rights grounds.

The Mulroney era?

Clearly, to go beyond repeats of the past a new awareness of the issues must emerge in Canada, and new means of carrying out policy as well. The end of an era, and the beginning of another, seems a propitious moment for change. During the last Canadian parliamentary election, Central America was practically a non-issue, an inherited situation the Turner caretaker government had done little to alter. The External Affairs Minister, Jean Chrétien, seemed to opt for increasing development aid — in itself a worthy cause — while making public pledges of support for Contadora that were never followed up with concrete steps.

Tory Brian Mulroney had next to nothing to say on the subject, although his party had in its ranks activist Sinclair Stevens, who served on the parliamentary subcommittee on Latin America and the Caribbean. Mr. Stevens has travelled throughout the region and favored Canadian full-