

Public attitudes towards foreign policy issues

Some recent trends

By Lawrence LeDuc and J. Alex Murray

Since the publication in 1972 of Mitchell Sharp's paper "Canada-U.S. Relations: Options for the Future" as a special issue of *International Perspectives*, there has been considerable public and private discussion of the long-term direction of Canada's foreign policy, particularly with regard to its relations with the United States. Recent developments in Canada regarding foreign-investment review procedures of trade and energy policy have served to keep sensitive areas of Canada-U.S. relations in more or less constant public view. Since the "Third Option" in Canadian foreign policy has been embraced as official Government policy, a new era in Canada's relations with the United States appears to be slowly emerging.

It is difficult to determine exactly what role public opinion has played in these developments. To be sure, public opinion in the area of foreign affairs frequently tends to follow rather than precede the formulation of policy. This certainly appears to have been the case with regard to the development and discussion of the Third Option strategy. On the other hand, shifts in foreign policy, as in other areas of public policy in a democratic society, are frequently the product of more subtle changes in public "moods" that may develop over a period. Interestingly enough, Mr. MacEachen referred quite explicitly to the climate of public opinion as part of the rationale for the Third Option in his January 1975 speech in Winnipeg, when he stated:

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This new feeling of being Canadian is reflected sharply in the economic field. The issue is our economic independence. I have already cited figures showing the degree to which we are dependent on the United States in trade and investment. A cross-section of various polls taken in 1972 indicated that 88.5 per cent of Canadians thought it important to have more control over our economy and that two out of every three Canadians considered the then level of American investment as too high.

Conscious of this generally-perceived link between the climate of public opinion on these issues and the development of new directions in Canadian foreign policy, we have sought to measure recent trends in public opinion with regard to economic nationalism and some specific implications of the conception of foreign policy "options" with the assistance of data from a series of annual public opinion surveys based on national samples of 5,000 respondents (*see box at end of article*).

Climate of nationalism

Our surveys, with those of CIPO (Gallup) and other organizations, have unmistakably documented the growing climate of nationalism in Canada in recent years, particularly with regard to economic matters. For example, Gallup found that the percentage of Canadians who felt that there was "too much U.S. influence in the Canadian way of life" rose from 29 per cent in 1956 to 58 per cent in 1974. More specifically, in the area of economic policy, our own surveys have found that the proportion of the population that felt that U.S. investment in Canada was, in general, "a bad thing" increased from 36 per cent in 1969 to a high of 55 per cent in 1973-74. While this statistic levelled off slightly in the most recent (1974-75) survey, it remained at a high level of 51 per cent of the total population.

In view of these fairly consistent findings, Mr. MacEachen's suggestion of a link between the evolution of the Third

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