

have developed into a social counterpart to the political enterprise of integration. This process has been to some extent welcomed by the Chrétien government. Under Foreign Affairs Ministers Ouellet and Axworthy, DFAIT has answered by widening the circle of consultees involved in the policy-making process. In addition to national fora on various dimensions of the country's foreign policy, the government has supported a national consultation in preparation for the Santa Cruz (Bolivia) summit on sustainable development, in 1996, and a series of regional consultations designed to feed into the preparation process for the Santiago Summit of the Americas.

The civil society basis for Canada's hemispheric enthusiasm is weak. It does not generally have strong converging interests or significant material investments. In a way, this should come as no surprise, given that, to a large extent, it is sustained and financed by the government. This, however, is only part of the problem, as government support could be seen as a kind of seed money. The rest lies instead in the lack of interest in the region, or in the inconsistencies of the commitment of those interested sectors.

The private sector, for one, has been betting on the South, but with utmost care. There is lots of talk about Canadian business interests in Latin America. Yet, while significant pockets of involvement do exist, such as the mining enclaves in Chile, the level of Canadian investment in Latin America, relative to total Canadian foreign investment, is not higher now than it was before the debt crisis. In some key sectors, banking in particular, the relative weight of Latin America is significantly less than at the beginning of the 1980s. In trade, when one compares the Team Canada harvest from visits in Asia and Latin America, the results from the latter look distinctly unimpressive. To use the latest two examples and accepting that number inflation is more or less proportional, the huge caravan of politicians and business people brought back \$8 billion of contracts from its 1997 visit to Asia and barely \$500 million for this January's foray in the biggest economies of Latin America.

Possibly more significant in the long term, the wider civil society linkages that have been established in recent years are led essentially by a coalition of NGOs and unions opposed to greater trade and investment liberalization. The NGO sector is probably the segment of Canadian society whose involvement in Latin America has been the most consistent over the last 20 years. In the 1980s, in fact, with government and business abandoning the region to its debt problems

and political instability, NGOs provided the only significant link to Latin America. NGO pressures forced the government to take political stands in a region it was tempted to forget about. Involvement was concentrated in Central America, where the last gasps of the Cold War were being played out, to devastating effect. Canadian NGOs and unions, as well as a few committed academic supporters, took clear stands in favour of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua and, to a lesser extent, guerrillas in El Salvador and Guatemala. Above all, they criticized US involvement in the region and governmental (in El Salvador, in particular) and opposition (the Nicaraguan Contras) elements that were supported by the Reagan and the Bush administrations.

The end of the 1980s was a major turning point for the region. Developments in Eastern Europe found echo in Central America, as the Sandinistas were defeated in the polls and the last all-out efforts of the Frente Farabundo Martí des Liberacion Nacional (FMLN) in El Salvador proved fruitless. Dreams of revolution and socialism vanished, and business people moved in. Quickly modernizing Mexico and Chile soon became international darlings, and the whole continent, suddenly governed by elected officials, embraced freer markets and trade liberalization. In Canada, the shock had come a year before, with the 1988 election, which became polarized around the Free Trade Agreement with the United States. Brian Mulroney's Conservatives won a majority of seats, but without a large political mandate. Yet, they ratified the treaty. This first move was soon to throw the country into NAFTA, which in turn determined the hemispheric option we have been living with since. The populist coalition of NGO and labour groups was opposed en bloc to the FTA—with Quebec perhaps less clearly divided. It then opposed NAFTA and now opposes the FTAA. At least since 1994, however, the hemispheric debate has taken trade liberalization and the basic parameters of liberal economics as givens. Moreover, with trade and economic issues becoming central to Canada's relationship with the region, the focus of interest has shifted from poor and small Central America to the much richer and bigger South American region. Refusing to accept the new parameters of economic policy in the hemisphere, NGOs and unions have none the less seen their weight in the policy debate diminish as business and government push for closer economic ties.

The long-term importance of the links established, especially through union networks, cannot be underestimated, however, if only because they are based on very real material interests. If there is one