

Making Canadian foreign policy

Caribbean Basin Plan "as an ideological tool directed against particular countries." The sub-committee stressed its fear that "a dangerous atmosphere of confrontation and polarization" in the region would tend to undermine cooperative efforts to solve problems, an atmosphere created by injection of the East-West conflict into Central America. And its report added that "potentially the most dangerous threat to stability in these regions" is "the growing confrontation between the United States and Cuba." Then the committee went beyond the Trudeau government in arguing that El Salvador was of urgent concern to Canada, that there should be serious negotiations between the junta and the rebels, an internationally supervised ceasefire before any elections were held in March, and that this too should be supervised by outside observers.

At this point the committee decided to make some on-site investigations, starting with the Caribbean, a proposal which at that time of year drew the usual raucous responses from a winter-bound House of Commons. The committee's researchers, however, had done their homework and the list of witnesses they had drawn up for the sub-committee included the same people whom any self-respecting journalist visiting these countries would have been interrogating as part of his assessment of the regional situation.

A Caribbean misadventure

The committee drew blood on its first stop, Haiti. Aware that this poorest country in the Americas was also the recipient of Canada's largest aid program there, the members were especially fascinated by the Trudeau government's little-publicized suspension of a \$20 million DRIPP program for integrated rural development just a month before the committee left Canada. The members heard, with increasing skepticism, President "Baby Doc" Duvalier and his self-serving colleagues complain about Canada abandoning them, and then on the DRIPP site, outside Port-au-Prince, heard and saw the real story. It became rapidly clear to the members that former CIDA president Paul Gerin-Lajoie had authorized a project far too grandiose and complex for such an elitist, authoritarian and primitive society to handle, lacking as it does any solid political and administrative infrastructure. And in letting this mistake drag on, CIDA found it increasingly difficult to halt the corruption and maladministration built into the local system. To every other aid donor in Haiti, the committee found, Canada's DRIPP had become an object lesson in what not to do in development in the land of "Jean-Claudisme." If Haitian officialdom heard the shocked reaction of Canadian parliamentarians, their people did not because the Duvalier-controlled press does not report such depressing news. But CIDA heard some scathing assessments when the committee resumed its investigations back home in Ottawa.

In Jamaica, the committee struggled against an embassy-devised itinerary loaded with the business viewpoint, a bias that did not go un-commented upon by some members. But they did get a chance to listen both to the rueful might-have-beens of former Prime Minister Michael Manley and the upbeat vision of Prime Minister Edward Seaga, explaining the private enterprise future of a Jamaica that President Reagan has applauded as a model for the new development in the Caribbean. To Seaga's irritation, some

members made it clear to him that the committee was unenthusiastic about the Caribbean Basin Plan (of which he is the alleged "godfather"), because of its American ideological overtones. Those who had visited Trinidad to meet other Caribbean officials told Seaga that his rosy view of the scheme was not shared by other Caribbean islanders.

The pull of Central America

In Costa Rica, then on the threshold of a national election, the committee was welcomed readily, probably because its earlier report had urged special attention and aid to Central America's most democratic country. And they listened to words of wisdom from Costa Rica's "father of democracy" José Figueres about the necessity for such an agricultural country to live within its means rather than going into debt to establish over-priced small industries, as it had done for 20 years.

Many of the members were disenchanted, and said so repeatedly, with the briefing on Central America from Canada's ambassador in Costa Rica, who covers the six countries. They felt Ottawa must be getting a very one-sided view of the changes going on there, if the dissertation they received on the Soviet-Cuban "master plan" for Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala was an example of his reporting. But then the members had their own pre-conceived notions of what is happening in this strife-torn isthmus, and visiting it did not modify their views very much. For instance, those who sympathized with the new regime in Nicaragua, found little to believe in the briefing given them there by the non-governmental Human Rights Commission of Nicaragua which cited Sandinista violations. Similarly, those who distrusted the Duarte-army junta in El Salvador, found nothing to distrust in the non-governmental Human Rights Commission there which cited only armed forces violations.

In Nicaragua, where the committee was allowed to sample a wide spectrum of opinion, those who were convinced the Sandinistas could do little wrong, found confirmation, while those who were concerned by the harassment of the private sector found equal confirmation. Yet none of them could find evidence for the Alexander Haig view of Nicaragua as a threat to the Caribbean Basin, and they publicly urged there that Canada not support the isolation of that country as Washington is attempting to do. At the same time, one member was forthright enough to face Daniel Ortega, the tough junta boss, with the reports of Sandinista harassment, bombing and shooting of Miskito Indians. The committee had heard of these events from three reputable local sources, and the government at that time was attempting to cover them up. They received an ambiguous non-answer from the gun-toting Ortega, but they had raised it with the press on hand to listen, something the Sandinista directorate probably doesn't often have to deal with.

Since the committee had originally decided on the grounds of personal safety to avoid El Salvador in their tour, they wound up the first two-weeks' swing in Cuba, where their presence caused Fidel Castro to pull out all the stops in an effort to get back into the good graces of the Canadian government. Since opposition does not tend to make itself known in public in Cuba today, the nearest the members got to hearing about problems in that society