

In economic matters, we tend to be shocked at the magnitude of the foreign debt incurred by Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and other countries of the continent, but too quickly overlook the fact that these countries have vibrant economies and immense human and political resources. Our own economic relationship shows these positive features very clearly. Latin America is Canada's most important export market after the United States, Western Europe and Japan. Venezuela and Mexico supply over half of Canada's petroleum imports. There is more Canadian investment in Latin America than in any other part of the world except the United States.

Canada therefore must approach Latin America as a diverse region in which our political and economic interests vary from country to country. Yet recognizing diversity does not frustrate the formulation of coherent policies.

If our relations with Latin America are to develop real strength, durability and content, if our commercial and economic relations are to flourish, and if Canada is to have influence in the continent, we must develop more substantial, broad-ranging political relations with the countries of Latin America. By so doing, we can advance a number of our objectives.

We can consolidate and expand our commercial and economic interests. We can also encourage the forces for positive change that are active in Latin America. We can contribute to the promotion of the fundamental values of Western civilization which are a common bond of all the countries of the hemisphere. We can work toward greater mutual understanding in bilateral relations. And we can help promote broader respect for human rights.