

REPORT FROM THE HILL



Soviet Relations

■ The Prime Minister reported to the House of Commons on 27 November about his trip the week before to the Soviet Union where he met, among others, Soviet President Gorbachev and Prime Minister Ryzhkov. External Affairs Minister Joe Clark met with his counterpart, Eduard Shevardnadze. Fourteen bilateral agreements (including renewals) were completed during the visit, on subjects ranging from international affairs to Arctic cooperation to the environment. The Prime Minister proposed to Mr. Gorbachev that he would suggest to his six Economic Summit colleagues that each year's chairman discuss with the Soviet President the ideas and strategies that emerge from the meeting.

There were extended responses from Liberal Leader John Turner and NDP External Affairs critic Bill Blaikie in which they criticized the government for insufficient boldness in dealing with the Soviets, particularly with respect to Mr. Gorbachev's proposal in his October 1987 Murmansk speech for an Arctic zone of peace.

Panama and the OAS

■ The Prime Minister came in for much sharper attack on 20 December in the Commons over his support, announced that morning, for US intervention in Panama. There was a heated exchange between Mr. Mulroney and the new NDP Leader Audrey McLaughlin. Ms. McLaughlin asked, "Is this the way for a civilized government to act in a civilized world? When is the Prime Minister going to communicate to the American government that Latin America is no longer the private backyard of the United States?" The Prime Minister stressed the special

circumstances of Panama and replied that the sentiments expressed by the NDP Leader were "so far removed from the mainstream fundamental values of Canadians, that she has just indicated why they [the NDP] will never, ever, be called upon to form a government in this country."

Other members were concerned about how the Canadian decision would affect relations with Latin American countries in the Organization of American States (OAS).

Indochina Policy

■ On 25 January Joe Clark provided a progress report to the Commons on international efforts to resolve the conflict in Cambodia. He indicated that the government "is now in the process of re-establishing the eligibility of Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, the three countries of Indochina, for official development assistance." Canada fully supports the Australian proposal for the establishment of a UN interim administration for Cambodia. Clark dispatched a diplomatic mission to Hanoi and Phnom Penh in October the purpose of which was to stress to those governments the importance of their accepting a major UN role in any settlement. The minister also commended the current Hun Sen regime in Cambodia for an improved record, especially in the field of human rights. He pointed out that Canada and other countries may be called upon to participate in UN-led peacekeeping and transitional arrangements and, to this end, Canada's recent experiences in Namibia and elsewhere were being reviewed.

Open Skies

■ A major international conference opened in Ottawa on 12 February bringing together the foreign ministers of the sixteen member states of NATO and the seven member states of the Warsaw Pact for the first time since the political changes began in the

Soviet bloc. Under discussion was a proposal for regular exchange of unarmed surveillance flights which would throw open the air space over North America, Europe and the Soviet Union as a confidence-building measure. A second round of talks, to be held later this year in Budapest, is expected to lead to the signing of a treaty.

Parliamentary Committees

■ The Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade (SCEAIT) continued to hold hearings on Canada's relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. These included sessions on the German question on 23 November and 6 December, on Soviet policy toward the Third World on 28 November, and on disarmament and Open Skies on 12 December.

The Committee also heard, on 23 November, from representatives of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Jesuits following their attendance at the funeral in El Salvador for six Jesuit priests and their two employees, murdered by members of the Salvadoran armed forces. The situation in El Salvador was the focus of discussion at additional meetings of SCEAIT on 13 and 14 December. The latter meeting also heard from the Director of Peacekeeping Operations in the Department of National Defence about Canada's contribution to ONUCA, the UN Observer Group in Central America.

On 7 December the Committee heard from a variety of experts, including the president of CIDA and the executive director of CUSO, on issues of structural adjustment – the economic stabilization policies imposed by international financial institutions with a view to reviving the economies of Third World debtor nations.

■ The Commons Standing Committee on National Defence is in the midst of hearings on maritime sovereignty. It has heard already from the Chief of Defence Staff as

well as officials from External Affairs, Environment, Fisheries and Oceans, the Canadian Coast Guard and the Solicitor-General, plus outside experts. In an interim report of 20 December, the Committee recommended the purchase of conventional submarines and maritime patrol aircraft.

Short Notes

■ Former NDP Leader Ed Broadbent took up a new appointment late in January as the first president of the government-funded crown corporation, the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, based in Montreal. Set up through legislation passed in September 1988, the Centre receives its funding from the CIDA budget and is intended to provide financial and technical resources to improve human rights and promote the development of democratic institutions and processes in Third World countries.

■ Doug Lindores, Senior Vice-President of CIDA, has been appointed special advisor on Ethiopia and bordering countries to the Minister of External Relations. These countries are again facing famine conditions.

■ During Question Period in the Commons on 23 January, Liberal MP Christine Stewart asked the government whether Canada had ignored human rights violations in the massive construction project of five Candu nuclear reactors in Romania. Joe Clark responded that Canadian diplomats were attempting to determine whether slave labour had in fact been used; which, if any, officials had been aware of it; and how long they had known. He rejected Ms. Stewart's suggestion that construction be suspended until details of the allegations could be checked, describing that as "an unfortunate way for Canada to proceed" at a critical time when Romania was struggling to build a democracy and restructure its economy. □

– GREG WIRICK