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Canadian International Development Assistance Policies:

An Appraisal (Second Edition)

Edited by Cranford Pratt

McGill–Queen’s University Press: Montreal-Kingston, 1996. Pp.338

In a political landscape of fiscal cutbacks, deficit reduction and devolution to local governments, discussions of Canadian international development assistance are rare. This political context makes the second edition of *Canadian International Development Assistance Policies: An Appraisal* a refreshing and enjoyable book to read. This collection of essays is written by academics and professionals who are undoubtedly devoted to the field of international development. Although they often project forebodingly on the future of Canadian development assistance, the authors provide a thorough and varied review of Canada’s development aid policies which leaves the reader feeling both pride and cynicism with respect to Canada’s record in the area.

The volume focuses on the Canadian International Development Agency (“CIDA”), which controls Canadian foreign aid. The first of three sections, Major Components of Canadian Aid provides an overview of the types of development assistance traditionally extended by Canada to developing nations such as multilateral and bilateral aid, food aid, and aid through non-governmental organizations (“NGOs”). Section two, Major Issues of Canadian Aid Policy, is the main substance of the book, delving into the many factors involved in formulating Canadian aid policy. Included in this section are chapters on choosing recipients for bilateral aid, the institutional character of CIDA, export promotion through development assistance, structural

adjustment, human rights in Canadian aid policy, the influence of public interest on Canadian aid to Central America, and Canadian development programs in Asia. The final section compares Canadian aid to that of other developed nations and concludes with a look at “humane internationalism” and the role of such values in shaping Canadian development assistance policies.

In spite of the book’s broad coverage of topics in Canadian aid policy, there are some noticeable holes in the collection. The editor acknowledges some of these holes in the Preface, where he apologizes for not having been able to include chapters on the environment and on emergency humanitarian aid. In addition to the gaps identified by the editor, a chapter on CIDA’s approach to gender issues is also conspicuously absent. Although an occasional reference to CIDA’s approach to Women in Development (“WID”) is made in several essays, there is no substantial treatment of the issue. For example, Phillip Rawkin’s comments on difficulties involved in translating policy into existing procedures and practices, and notes that the policy priority of maximizing the benefits of CIDA projects for women was built into projects through a “checkoff” mechanism, which is an attachment to project documents explicating how the project benefits women. Rawkin’s suggestion is that this mechanism is little more than a rubber stamp to standardize procedures without implementing real change.¹ Elsewhere, Marcia M. Burdette comments on the harmful effects of structural adjustment programs on women.² Given the importance of women’s roles in the development process these piecemeal comments are insufficient coverage of the topic. The omission of gender as a separate topic may have been excusable in the 1994 first edition of the book given that its publication coincided with increasing attention to gender issues in CIDA programs.³ However, the editor had ample opportunity before the second edition was published in 1996 to fully address both the topics he recognized as lacking as well as Women in Development. These absences leave an unexplained void in the otherwise thorough and extensive analysis of CIDA policies presented in this collection.

What was perhaps more distracting by its absence was the lack of attention, either in a separate chapter or within existing ones, paid to explaining why aid is important and to justifying the Canadian government’s continued support for international aid programs. Traditionally, Canada has supported foreign aid for primarily humanitarian reasons and humanitarian objectives persist as an underlying motivation for much of CIDA’s work. However, this book does not present a coherent rationale for the continued pursuit of humanitarian goals overseas. For instance, Cranford Pratt’s introductory chapter, *Canadian Development Assistance: A Profile* presents Canadian aid in terms of acronyms and numbers, which does little to make the case that development assistance is a necessary and productive endeavor. Other essays present a rationale for aid that is based on commercial interests, explaining how Canadian aid programs satisfy domestic government and industry agendas for

1 P. Rawkins, “An Institutional Analysis of CIDA” in C. Pratt (ed.), *Canadian International Development Assistance Policies: An Appraisal* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996. at 166, 167.

2 M. Burdette, “Structural Adjustment and Canadian Aid Policy”, see above at 227, 228.

3 Increased prominence for gender issues was in part due to the recommendations contained in Canada’s *Foreign Policy: Principles and Priorities for the Future*, a report released by the House of Commons Special Joint Committee reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy. See C. Pratt, “Humane Internationalism and Canadian Development Assistance Policies” see note 1 at 364.

increased exports and trade ties. For example, the chapters by Mark Charlton (Continuity and Change in Canadian Food Aid), David Gilles (Export Promotion and Canadian Development Assistance), and Cranford Pratt (Humane Internationalism and Canadian Development Assistance Policies) clearly document the rise of commercialization in Canadian foreign aid. While these authors are critical of the commercialization trend, they are also careful to point out that social and political interests still have a role in shaping CIDA policies. With their sometimes cautious, sometimes strong, critiques of the commercial interest basis for foreign aid, these chapters far from satisfy the need for a clear statement of the rationale behind the supposed humanitarian objectives of Canadian development assistance.

The justification for Canadian contributions to foreign aid is addressed in the book, but only in passing comments that must be collected and synthesized as they are found. Cranford Pratt states that “The Canadian public and Parliament have supported aid for over forty years, primarily for humanitarian reasons” and that “There are persuasive long-term Canadian interests in international stability and in the successful management of a wide range of issues that can only be dealt with on an international basis and with the cooperation of the Third World.”⁴ Jean-Philippe Thérien states that “Aid can ... be viewed as the product of an international culture based on an evolving consensus on how North-South relations are to be organized.”⁵ and links Canadian aid to national interests and Canada’s role as a “middle power” amongst nations on the international stage. T.A. Keenleyside quotes Paul Gèrin-Lajoie, former president of CIDA, who “wrote that the central objective of aid was “the total liberation of man” – liberation, first, from hunger, disease, illiteracy, unemployment, and chronic underemployment, but liberation also from ‘the use of force to silence dissenters, systematic recourse to political imprisonment, and the torture of prisoners.’”⁶ Together, these points begin to create an understanding of why Canada has been and continues to be active in development assistance, but they do not satisfy the need for a justification of aid in an era where ‘humanitarian concerns’ are easily overlooked in favour of economic ones. Although the authors recognize the vast changes in store for Canadian development assistance policies at the time of writing (1992/93), the idea of development assistance is still ‘a given’ for them. As development professionals and academics, the authors assume that the importance of international aid is self-evident rather than an issue that needs to be addressed in an appraisal of Canadian aid policies. It seems ironic that the authors frequently allude to the “end of an era”⁷ in Canadian development assistance with trepidation and regret yet do not take the opportunity afforded by this book to promote and justify Canada’s international development efforts.

From a 1996 perspective, and in light of the drastic cutbacks and realignment that Canadian aid programs have undergone since the first edition of this book was published, it cannot be assumed that the rationale for international development assistance is understood by the Canadian public. Readers need to be brought out of the nationalist introspection that is currently evident in both Canadian

4 C. Pratt, see note 3 at 334 and 371 respectively.

5 J.-P. Thérien, “Canadian Aid: A Comparative Analysis” see note 1 at 316.

6 T.A. Keenleyside, “Aiding Rights: Canada and the Advancement of Human Dignity” see note 1 at 240.

7 C. Pratt, “Canadian Development Assistance: A Profile” see note 1 at 20.

8 M. Charlton, “Continuity and Change in Canadian Food Aid” see note 1 at 80, 81.

9 C. Pratt, “Preface” see note 1 at xi.

and American domestic politics. The authors correctly note this inward focus as an important factor in the shift towards satisfying domestic commercial interests rather than humanitarian ones through Canadian aid strategies. It is not enough to demonstrate that these shifts in CIDA policies reflect similar shifts in most OECD donor countries. Readers need to be reminded of conditions in developing countries and of human tragedies far from home. They also need to be told of pragmatic, even self-interested, reasons for realizing international development separate and apart from domestic commercial interests but which still address “that basic humanitarian instinct... to assist in the ‘alleviation of hardships due to circumstances beyond one’s control.’”⁸ National interests in global environmental and economic security as well the stabilization of global population growth are examples of such reasons. Without drawing these connections, the authors succeed only in preaching to the converted. While this need for justification may not have been obvious when the first edition was published, the changes that occurred in the two year period before the second edition came out should have made it clear. Given the objective of “...making a valuable contribution to the continuing public dialogue and debate about Canada’s international responsibilities and opportunities vis-à-vis global poverty,”⁹ the collection needs to begin with a forceful statement of the case for international development assistance and entice readers to consider what has become a controversial proposition.

Despite this criticism, the appraisal of Canadian development assistance policies provided in this collection of essays is informative and, for anyone interested in Canadian foreign policy in general, well worth reading. The historical overview of the growth of CIDA and of factors that have influenced the direction of aid policy is important for understanding current directions in Canadian development assistance policies. For instance, the review of Canada’s food aid program in *Continuity and Change in Canadian Food Aid* provides insight on why bilateral food aid, as a proportion of total overseas development assistance, has steadily decreased over the past two decades despite strong public support and seemingly simple humanitarian goals. Also of particular interest were the chapters on the institutional character of CIDA and on the role of NGOs in the Canadian development strategy. The institutional analysis provides a unique perspective that is normally inaccessible to those who are not employed or otherwise involved in CIDA. The explanations of the tensions existing between senior managers and project team leaders supports a deeper understanding of CIDA operations and the discussion of CIDA’s culture and traditional organization is key to comprehending the difficulty of implementing change in this particular government agency. And finally, I learned a new and useful term to describe inconsistency in government bureaucracy: “adhococracy.”¹⁰ The chapter reviewing the relationship between CIDA and NGOs, entitled *Paying the Piper: CIDA and Canadian NGOs*, demonstrates the radical departure that the contemporary approach has taken from CIDA’s approach in previous eras. CIDA’s current approach to dealing with NGOs favours “one-stop shopping”, which gives greater prominence to large, less “grass-roots” oriented NGOs and curtails the role of NGOs in

10 Rawkins, see note 1 at 164.

11 Pratt, see note 3 at 370.

12 Pratt see above at 369.

formulating aid policy. This approach is significantly different from previous ones which established Canada's reputation in international circles for maintaining a collaborative relationship between CIDA and Canadian NGOs. This collaboration also contributed to the Canadian reputation for commitment to developmental needs as a priority in aid policy; a reputation that is now being threatened.

Although there are holes in this appraisal, some acknowledged and some not, interested readers will find this collection of essays replete with information and valuable insights regarding CIDA and the formulation of aid policies in Canada. It is unfortunate that the authors' sense of foreboding regarding the future of CIDA and Canadian development assistance has been justified by the events of the last few years. The time that has passed since the first edition of this book was written and published emphasizes the changes in Canadian political culture and values which have occurred and which necessitate a justification of continued public funding for Canada's development assistance efforts. Cranford Pratt states that "Humane internationalism, though markedly in retreat, is not yet overwhelmed."¹¹ As the traces of this value become harder to detect in Canadian foreign aid policies, it is difficult not to read the essays in this collection without a touch of nostalgia for an era in which "The government of Canada... affirmed that its primary objective was to reach and help the poorest countries and people while encouraging Canadians to take pride in the quality and integrity of its development assistance"¹² and in which, at the very least, support for the idea of public development aid could be assumed.

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