

REVIEW

Review of Linda Freeman (1997) *The Ambiguous Champion; Canada and South Africa in the Trudeau and Mulroney Years*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

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The ambiguous champion of this book is Canada and the cause is the anti-apartheid struggle. The author, Linda Freeman, a Canadian political scientist, was herself prominent as an academic activist on southern African issues. In this monograph, she reflects on the sanctions campaigns in which she was involved and writes what is in fact a good diplomatic history of the Canadian side of the relationship between our two countries during the post-World War II generations. No doubt many other studies on anti-apartheid movements will be written; at best, they will, as does this study, suggest continuities in foreign policy that will remain relevant in understanding aspects of current South African practises.

Freeman's analysis is structured around a very effective periodisation. Up to 1960, Canadian foreign policy viewed South Africa as a sympathetic ally. Ironically, this was largely a residue of the World War II alliance which meant little or nothing to the post-1948 Pretoria government. During this period, apartheid was a minor nuisance, a South African problem where Canadians had no right to interfere. In 1960, however, the arrival of significant African membership in the Commonwealth coupled with political crisis in South Africa rather quickly and permanently changed South Africa's position in Canadian eyes. Conservative prime minister John Diefenbaker, motivated by the need to maintain a strong anti-Communist Commonwealth in which Canada could play the role of a great power, came down on the side of South Africa's critics. He broke ranks in effect with the fraternity of white brothers — although he would not have done so had the South Africans shown any sign of concession or movement. Canada acquired a reputation for solidarity with the black Commonwealth which Freeman argues convincingly was only partially deserved. Thereafter ensued a long period when Canada combined occasionally eloquent verbal assaults on South Africa with practical policies that made sure no serious economic interests were affected. One reason lay in internal divisions among Canadian bureaucrats. In the private sector, the pressure for business as usual was strong; servicing it ensured that state rhetoric and reality did not tie together too closely.

The internal convulsions of the middle 1980s, however, brought about a new and, in Freeman's view, rather impressive radicalisation in Canadian policy on South Africa closely linked to the role of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, an otherwise right-wing politician. Whereas before 1960, almost all Canadians had related to white South Africans as friends and allies, polls all suggested that now they were generally behind a tough sanctions policy and sympathised with the black majority. One result was to empower activists in the Canadian labour movement, universities and elsewhere for whom South Africa became a big issue.

The relatively substantial sanctions measures taken by Mulroney were not entirely sustained, however. Prior to 1990, the apparent re-stabilisation of the South African situation led to a backsliding where the earlier contradictions came again to the fore. Nonetheless, while Canada's record was less impressive from the perspective of the ANC than the Nordic countries, or indeed, for the late-1980s, the USA, it was in a good position to put itself forward as a friend and advance its own material interests in the post-1994 context.

Freeman's view makes sense. She explains the 1960 shift well in terms of Canadian Commonwealth ambitions and the need to relate to the 'New Commonwealth' members. The 1985 shift is explicable too in terms of the response to a potentially revolutionary situation in South Africa. Sanctions was a deliberate substitute for supporting revolutionary change; it was a successful strategy aimed at keeping anti-apartheid forces on board the capitalist ship. For Canada, it projected a distinctive international image usefully. Maybe the need to promote 'multi-culturalism' and racial tolerance inside Canada also deserves to be flagged. Perhaps Freeman steps too lightly on contradictions within the sanctions cause. Her own activist convictions and commitments to sanctions make it hard perhaps to expound too fully on this theme.

There are also arguably a few other limitations to this study. One would have liked more on the South African side of the equation: how did the apartheid authorities see things and how did they rate the significance of Canadian actions? What about the role of Quebec? While Freeman brings out Canada's role in the Commonwealth very well, it was surprising to see so little reference to Canadian-American discussions and contacts. Freeman does say some interesting things about Canada's role in international affairs as a constrained but significant 'middle' power, constantly searching for the right stance within parameters set by the dominant Western paradigm. She aims at an approach to international relations that falls between the schematic positivism of some specialists and the overly mechanistic instrumentalist views favoured by some radicals and takes an interest in internal struggles within the Canadian state,

highlighting the priorities of particular individuals who do make a difference. This approach might be suggestive to students of post-apartheid South African foreign policy making.