

A terminal case of Bwana Fever

Across the Mafungabusi plateau, along the brown waters of the Muamadazi, down to dusty Chicualacuala came the sound of drums. It was the bush telegraph beating out the message: "Bwana Clark come, come from Ca-na-da, bring big gifts for our chiefs."

And true it was, for there in Lusaka, Zambia was our own cheery Joe Clark, dispensing advice and money to the sorry little collection of threadbare Marxist states that have become Canada's version of those adopt-a-baby ads one sees in magazines: "Just \$1 million a day will keep this little African country from starving!"

Gladhanding around southern Africa — I call it Bwana Fever — is by now a tropical disease in Ottawa. All you have to do is dish out lots of cash and all those nice black leaders slap your back, seek your advice and put on those nifty tribal dances with feathers and spears.

Next comes the quickie visit to South Africa where a menacing Clark will scowl at the evil racist Boers and tell them where to get off. Don't forget the morally uplifting meeting with the African National Congress, too. And remember to bring lots of color film.

All of this is gee-whiz fun for Clark, Brian Mulroney and the media. It also emphasizes the progressive end of the Progressive Conservatives and plays nicely to Canada's left. But as foreign policy, the Mulroney-Clark mania for Africa is both foolish and shamefully negligent. Here's why.

Canada has no business sticking its head into the hornet's nest of southern Africa's complex problems. All of Ottawa's angry chirping and twittering will not make one whit of difference to what happens there. The taxpayers' money being lavished on the nasty dictatorships



Eric MARGOLIS

in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Tanzania is being poured down a black hole.

We should not give the time of day to these countries until they stop their human rights abuses and allow freedom of the press, parties and unions.

Look at the smarmy fascination of both Ottawa and much of our media with left-wing dictatorships. They positively drool over police states like Mozambique or Tanzania. They froth at the mouth over right-wing dictatorships like Chile or Taiwan. But, worst of all, they utterly ignore what should be the object of our attention and support — the struggling democracies of our own hemisphere.

Charity begins at home. Our home is the Western Hemisphere. Here is the logical and legitimate centre of our security, political and humanitarian concerns. And here are enough problems to keep Ottawa's foreign affairs nabobs busy for a decade.

Let me point to some examples. Instead of jettisoning about the African bush and financing dictators, Joe Clark should be paying attention to our desperately needy neighbor, Peru. There, President Alan Garcia is manfully fighting to preserve Peru's new and fragile

democracy, to put down murderous, lunatic guerrillas and to feed the nation's dirt-poor people.

Peru's armed forces have threatened numerous coups against Garcia, the last fairly recently. That is precisely when Clark should have rushed down to Lima and stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Garcia on the steps of the presidential palace, showing the soldiers that Canada stands behind Peru's democracy.

When Argentina's angry generals threatened that young democracy's government, Canada should have immediately shown its support for President Raul Alfonsin. Clark should also have gone to Uruguay to bolster that country's infant democracy. And, for that matter, to war-torn Guatemala and El Salvador where democratically elected governments are struggling against extremists of the left and right.

And what about the West Indies? These little island states have managed to preserve their proud democratic systems in the face of staggering economic problems. If anyone deserves Canadian aid it is Jamaica, with 50% unemployment, or other needy places like St. Kitts, Nevis, and St. Lucia. What about wretched Haiti, where people are starving and dying in their own filth?

Here is where Canadian money and assistance can make a major difference. Of course, such work is neither glamorous nor fun and it doesn't thrill the left.

Still, I would have been proud to see Mulroney for once show some spunk by accompanying Alfonsin when the Argentine president went alone into an army base to put down a revolt. Or to see Clark opening a health clinic in the slums of Port au Prince.

But they seem to prefer watching tribal dancers in the squalid Marxist dictatorships of southern Africa. And being called "Bwana."