

Let's-pretend Tories

A letter came recently into my possession that casts a luridly revealing light on the thinking of our supposedly conservative government.

It also has much to say about the ethical values of our cabinet ministers who never seem to miss a chance to lecture other nations on morality.

Last July, Defence Minister Perrin Beatty was invited to address Campaign Freedom, a conference of the anti-communist ABN movement. On Sept. 4 Beatty replied, declining to attend.

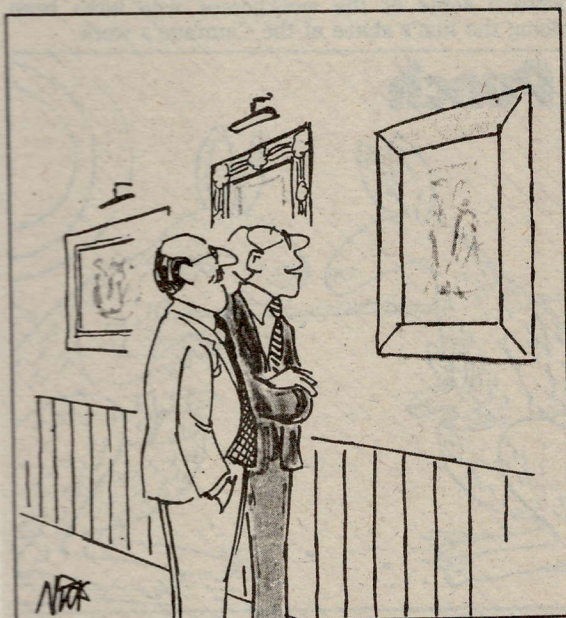
Among the reasons cited: "I am sure that you will appreciate that directly associating myself, as minister of national defence, with your organization could be construed by *some* countries as an *unfriendly gesture* by Canada; and it is with these same countries that we are currently trying very *hard to improve our relations* (italics mine)."

And which country was Beatty referring to? Clearly, the Soviet Union. Here he was going on record that Canada's policy is to avoid antagonizing the Soviets. It's all right to kick sand in the faces of non-customers like South Africa, Chile, or Syria. That makes us feel all tingly and moral and sort of brave. But with the Soviets, different rules apply.

By interesting coincidence, a Soviet publication just crossed my desk proudly announcing that the USSR is Canada's fifth largest trading partner. The USSR, it seems, buys more Canadian wheat than any other nation. Such trade, claim the Soviets, runs about 50:1 in Canada's favor. Aha! Could Beatty's shyness be related to these trade figures?

Criticizing the Soviets over Afghanistan — or helping maimed Afghan children — might just cause Moscow to cut its wheat imports, and we all

Punch



"Notice how subtly his paintings have appreciated 300 percent this year."

ERIC MARGOLIS



know how testy the farmers will get. Why, the Soviet publication even points out how the port of Churchill, Man., is kept alive by Soviet trade. So much, then, for morality. I'm sure if South Africa bought as much wheat as the Russians, Ottawa would quickly shut up about apartheid.

All of this is obvious, if painful. But it gets worse. In his letter, Beatty continues by asserting his government's opposition to repression in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (note *there* is no mention of Cuba, another Canadian trading partner) and its intention to promote human rights.

Then, the key phrase that shows just how dim is the thinking up in snowy Ottawa: "We feel, however, that real progress in this regard (human rights) can only be achieved if we can first lower the barriers of mutual fear and suspicion."

Incredibly, Beatty is suggesting that repression in the Soviet bloc is somehow caused by "fear and suspicion." He is telling us that the Soviets jail dissidents, Jews, Christians and Moslems because they are scared by Canada! I suppose one could make the case that poor, picked-on Adolf Hitler was also afraid and suspicious.

Defence Minister Beatty must be doing a super job if the mighty Soviet Union, 277 million people strong, views Canada with fear and suspicion. Does Beatty really think that lights are burning late at night in the Kremlin as gravely worried commissars debate how to deal with the mounting Canadian threat?

The sadly confused Beatty is merely repeating the old leftist saw that the Soviets are only dangerous and aggressive because they feel insecure. He should ask the Poles, Latvians or Mongolians.

This kind of mushy thinking, coming from a supposedly conservative government and from a minister of defence is appalling. Is there no one left in Mulroney's government who views the outside world with other than childlike optimism, do-gooder giddiness, or with the abiding leftist perspective of the Trudeau years?

Maybe Beatty will explain to us in more detail how Canada should set about convincing the frightened Soviets that we are really not a threat. Disarm the RCMP? Take away Joe Clark's nail clippers? Most important, don't let any of those Afghan children whose feet have been blown off by Soviet mines into Canada for therapy. That would scare the Russians and do nothing to better relations.

Anyway, why is our defence minister so deeply and visibly concerned about improving relations with Russia and being non-threatening? Isn't his job keeping Canada strong and free?