AN INTERVIEW WITH *Barbara McDougall*[1]

*Julián Castro Rea**

Barbara McDougall, former foreign minister of Canada, granted us an interview last year. She reviews her participation —central at key moments— in her country's international affairs.

The Honorable Barbara McDougall was appointed secretary of state for external affairs of Brian Mulroney's Conservative government on April 21, 1991. Upon occupying that post, which she held until June 1993, she also became the president of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense Policy. In 1984 she was elected to Parliament for the district of St. Paul's, Ontario. Before becoming foreign minister, she was minister of state for finance, minister of state for privatization and, simultaneously, minister responsible for the status of women. From 1988 to 1991, she was minister of employment and immigration. Before participating in politics, Mrs. McDougall was a financial analyst in Vancouver, Edmonton and Toronto; the executive director of the Canadian Council of Financial Analysts; and a financial columnist for the written media and television. She is a graduate of the University of Toronto and was named doctor *honoris causa* in law by St. Lawrence University in New York.

The following is her vision of Canada's international policy today and in the recent past. Though the essentials have been respected, parts of the interview have been omitted for space reasons.

Julián Castro Rea: *What are the fundamental differences of Canadian foreign policy in the 1990s from the previous policy?*

Barbara McDougall: Well, I don't think there was a big difference. I think there was a difference following the change of goverment in 1993; but that is because a different political party was elected.... One of the differences between our government and the new government has to do with human rights, because our goverment was a strong advocate of human rights throughout the world, including in China, [and] Indonesia —regarding East Timor.

The new government has totally downplayed that; they are not really pursuing any human rights agenda at all. That is quite a fundamental change for Canada. Foreign policy now is almost entirely trade-dominated. That came as a result of the 1993 election. But between the 1980s and 1990s, no. There is a fundamental philosophical difference between the party that is in power now and the party that was in power. But that came about as a result of the election, not because of anything else[2].

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[1] My thanks to Ann Kinsolver for her help in transcribing this interview.

[2] One of the first things Lloyd Axworthy did after being appointed minister of foreign affairs in February 1996 was to declare, "Respect for human rights is a critical component of the Canadian identity and therefore must play an important role in our foreigh policy agenda.... Both trade and the promotion of human rights can serve the same purpose, namely bettering the well-being of individuals." "Notes for an Address by the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy," Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, Ottawa, February, 1996. [Author's note.]

JCR: *The foreign policy priorities of the current Liberal government are upside down compared with the former Conservative priorities: trade is now on the top, human rights at the bottom. Do you think the promotion of human rights is compatible with defence of Canadian economic interests?*

BM: Yes, I do. If you have values, you have to have them all the time. You can't just have them some of the time. How you express those values will be shaped by a number of issues, including economic issues. I mean, there would be no point, for example, in a country like Canada unilaterally having economic sanctions against China. I mean, it wouldn't do any good, and it would hurt our industry badly. But in a less-than-perfect world you do what you can, so we really restricted our relationship with China, in ways that had not been done before and are not being done now. The Chinese really like high-level visits, I mean, the current Prime Minister's first trip abroad was to China —it was a big show to our business people.... And that sends out all sorts of signals. There are three reasons that you have to find ways to support human rights. First of all, you want to try to make an impression, to try to make a change in behaviour on the part of (since we are talking about China) Chinese leadership. That is hard to do for a country like Canada. But you also want to send messages to the dissidents inside that they do have friends around the world who have not forgotten them. And the third thing is that you have to be true to your own values, I mean, that is an ethical axiom. So if you can't do one hundred percent of what you would like around trade sanctions, for example, then you withhold approval in other ways. The only ministerial visits that were allowed while I was a minister were very low-level visits, like the minister for wheat went to China, but the foreign minister didn't, the Prime Minister didn't, because we were withholding our approval. We kept diverse; we kept very strong trade barriers, or at least restrictions on trade with regard to arms, for example, nuclear, the CANDU [3] reactor; we did not send a mission to China with nuclear technology. Well, the nuclear technology, the CANDU people, were very much part of the new [Liberal] trade mission.

So it is not just the focus on trade [of the Liberal government]; it is that everything is being abandoned. It was the same with Indonesia. Now, we

[3] CANDU refers to Canadian Deutereum Uranium which are nuclear reactors set up for producing electricity and other non-military uses. [Author's Note.]

don't do a lot of trade with Indonesia: they got 44 million dollars, a fairly large hunk of aid. And all the aid, people said, went after the East Timor killings.... I mean, I wanted to just cut off the whole thing, but the advice I got from the aid people was that you cannot stop projects in the middle. If you are doing an irrigation project, for example, you just cannot stop it in the middle because you would probably do some damage. So all we could cut off was new projects although I would have preferred to just pull out all the dollars.

JCR: *In effecting this change, are the Liberals responding to a shift in Canadian public opinion or are they simply trying to deny the Tory heritage?*

BM: Both. I think some of it is public opinion. Sometimes you have to rise above public opinion, and you have to say you believe Canada should take a stand, and here's why. Some people won't buy it. But some people will, and that is what we tried to do. You can't go against public opinion forever. I mean, you can't take an unpopular stand and go down in flames. It's not very wise.

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And you've got to bring people along with you; that is the purpose of a democracy.

But coming out of a recession, there is no question of public opinion. During a recession, we would have strongly supported trade of any kind, anything that said "jobs." If you said anything that wasn't jobs, then it was not very popular. I don't know that there was any real job loss as a result of either of these things. At the margin, there probably was some. There are lots of areas where Canada can expand its trade. I am "underwhelmed" by the size argument of China, that it is one of the biggest countries and [fastest] growing economies. Well, that's fine, but, you know, we've got 30 million people, and we can grow very nicely without China; there are millions of places we can trade with.

JCR: *One of the consequences of Canada's international promotion of human rights was the support of "An Agenda for Peace," put forth by Boutros Ghali in June 1992. But after the experiences of Somalia and Yugoslavia, do you still think it is worth challenging state sovereignty for the defence of human rights to get these mixed results?*

BM: Yes, I do. First of all, lives have been saved in both Yugoslavia and Somalia. That is fundamental, however botched the missions may have been. And they were hard, because the mandate was not clearly defined and there was a lot of division in Europe, for example, on how to deal with Yugoslavia. The international consensus was very difficult to build. That does not mean you don't do it; that doesn't mean we don't try it again.

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Somalia was a bad mission for a whole lot of reasons. First of all, it was not under UN command; it was under U.S. command, and the Americans, bless their hearts —they do lots of things well and I am a big fan of the United States in many ways— but they just don't get it about peacekeeping. They don't understand the whole concept. I mean, they understand shooting wars; they don't understand wars where you have to have a lot of patience, you have to negotiate. That situation fell apart, in terms of being able to resolve it, or being able to keep a lid on it, the day that the Americans said that Aideed[4] was the villain. In peacekeeping you don't do that. I mean, you know the Serbs are the villain in Yugoslavia, but your job is to bring them to the table. So, as soon as you say they are the villain, you've lost your capacity to be peacekeepers; you are now in a different place.

[4] General Mohammed Farrah Aideed, a Somalian warlord blamed for the killing of 24 UN soldiers. [Author's Note.]

Now, I still think over time the Agenda for Peace will be a fundamental working document at the UN. Well, maybe not, maybe I am being too optimistic. Those missions were really cobbled together. In Yugoslavia, we called for a very early intervention, but by the time the peacekeepers got in there, into Croatia, both sides were really mobilized. The Serbs were able to arm themselves; the sanctions would have been a blessing given to them because they had this whole period when there was this argument going on about whether the West would send in peacekeepers or whether we would intervene... Of course it's all done publicly now, it's all done on CNN, so, they knew exactly what was going on. I mean, nobody ever stopped them. I think if we had gone in earlier, it would have made a big difference to that situation, before they had the capacity to get polarized.

The second thing that happened was that it took ages to get sanctions in. Everything just took forever, while all this was going on and the situation was deteriorating; and we set up the humanitarian mission and it was used as cover to send arms in... Everything about it just really deteriorated badly, and it came out of a badly defined mandate. I really believe that there are people alive today that wouldn't be if we hadn't got in.[5]

There is so much anger now that did not exist in the beginning. I think ordinary civilians are kind of puzzled as to why all this happened. Especially the Muslims. Positions hardened so much that they're just going to hate each other for another 10 generations. It's just awful! I have been there and it is truly bad.

JCR: *Canada supported the Gulf War and the U.S. invasion of Panama. Both moves were criticized, the former because there was no clear UN mandate, the latter within the OAS. Are there still differences in the U.S. and Canadian approaches to world security?*

BM: I think so. The Gulf War and Panama happened before I was a minister. I don't think Panama was one of our better decisions as a government.

The Gulf War actually would not have been a UN-led mission... it would not have had UN participation, had it not been for Canada. Because Brian Mulroney told George Bush that he would not support this unless there was UN involvement, that he would send troops as part of the UN and that was all.

Now, it was clearly U.S.-dominated, no question about that. But I think that it was a very traditional cross-the-border sovereignty issue. I mean, Iraq went into Kuwait,

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drew a line in the sand.... No. You cannot do this. The implications of not doing it —aside from the oil, because people who were cynical say the U.S. wanted to go in because of the oil— for stability in the Middle East would have been huge. I think that it would not have stopped with Kuwait. I think that [President Saddam] Hussein had very large ambitions in the region and I think that if we had stood aside and let Kuwait go, it would have gone further than that. And Israel is certainly the most vulnerable in terms of any expansionist dreams that Hussein might have had. They crossed the border and people went in and stopped them... So that all the arguments about sovereignty that existed later and the other stuff did not exist there.

We went into Haiti, and you know the Americans were very reluctant to go into Haiti, and we essentially said you cannot allow this to happen in our hemisphere, now that we've got democracies essentially throughout. Brian [Mulroney] once again talked George Bush into really doing something. And then [President William] Clinton

[5] On November 21, 1995 the forces in conflict in ex-Yugoslavia signed the Dayton Agreement, which provides that the UN multinational forces (UNPROFOR) were replaced by a NATO intervention force (IFOR). Canada comitted itself to sending 1,000 soldiers on this new mission and to co-operate in Bosnia's reconstruction. [Author's Note.]

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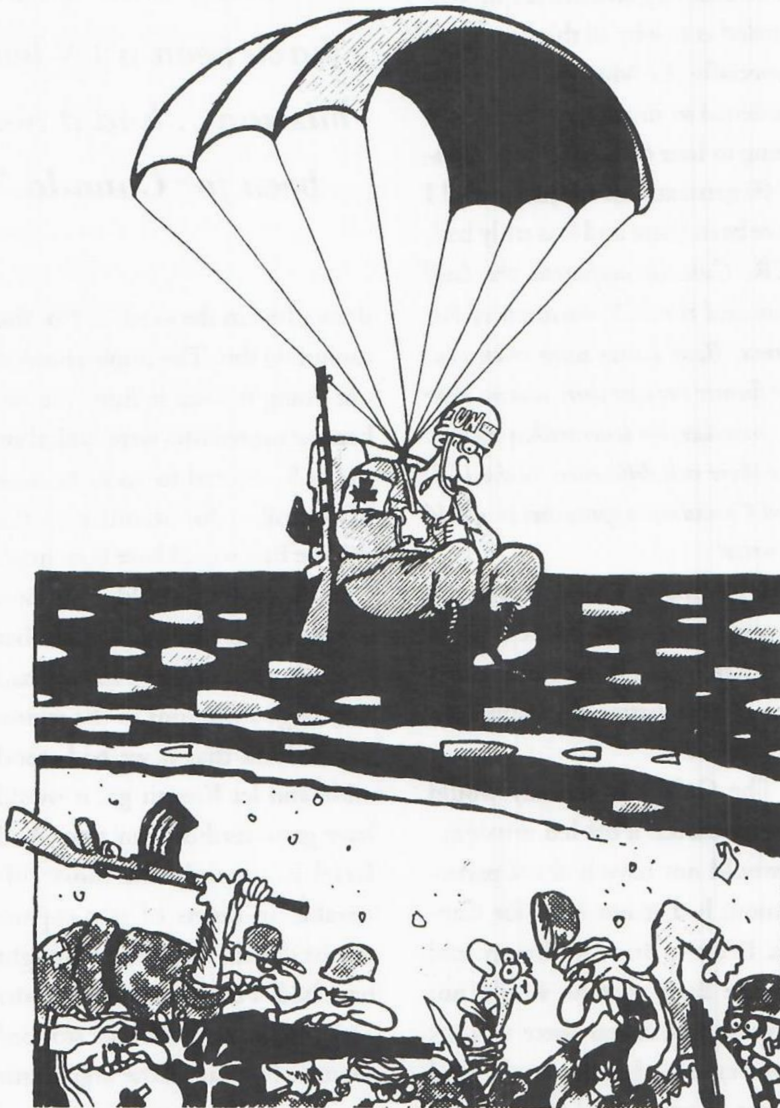

In current missions, Canadian peacekeeping forces are sent where conditions for peace are yet to be met.

kind of heightened the U.S. involvement once again, and he was totally briefed by Brian Mulroney. I must say the Haiti event is not over yet. For example, your country did not want to go in.

I understand the sensitivity on the sovereignty issues that the Mexicans have. It is a different approach than we have. I would have appreciated their support. They never wanted to go in, and they never referred to anything we did, and that is too bad because they could be real leaders in the hemisphere. And there were other countries with the same concerns: Chile, I remember, was very concerned about this. But I could just see if we let the military get away with this in Haiti, without taking it on, all of those kind of precarious new democracies that used to be governed by the military through the whole of Latin America would be really quite vulnerable. Would we let Pinochet come back? I don't know. Probably. But I think you've got to take those issues on.

JCR: *What does Mexico mean for Canada within the NAFTA context, taking into account recent events such as the Chiapas uprising, the financial crisis, etc.? Do you think there is a convergence in the approach the U.S. and Canada have towards Mexico?*

BM: First of all there are —and I had not actualy realized this; I haven't been in Mexico very often— very strong ties between Mexico and Canada that have existed for a long time. There are a great many Mexicans who are sent to Canada for their education, right across the country, going back a long time, long before there was any envisaging of NAFTA, or closer ties, or any of those things. Going back several generations there had been affiliations with Canada in one way or another. I was amazed at that, I hadn't realized that. I am ashamed to say they knew a lot more about

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Canada than I did about Mexico, except from, you know, going back to the study of history and foreign affairs, which I've always done anyway. But it was essentially a kind of intellectual interest...

And then I started discovering Canadians who had had some involvement with Mexico. In the contemporary context, both Mexico and Canada are always looking for counterbalance to their relationships with the U.S. Canada has always had a kind of love/hate relationship along this great long common border, and I know that you are in the same position. U.S. capital and all those things are really important to you, but there is an unease about, this big guy —up north for you, and down south for us. And it is not an anti-U.S. feeling, it is a balance of power issue, more than not liking the U.S. or not wanting the involvement. I think there is always a striving to look for a more balanced relationship.

In the contemporary context, in the trade world, post-Cold War, globalization, all those things that people talk about all the time, Mexico and Canada can achieve that greater balance of power that they have been seeking for so long. I think a lot of it depends on Mexico continuing down the track of democracy and human rights, because that will affect the relationship.

I think that Canadians concerned about the environment, for example, will continue to be looking at those issues. There is tendency on the part of Canadians to be quite patronizing about Mexico. I am talking about the broad public and not people who are closely connected.

Mexico and Canada can also be allies in the broader context, the context of the UN, the OAS, putting forth some common agendas... I think we can help each other. Canada, for example, helped Mexico get into APEC[6] and I worked very hard on that, when I was minister. It happened after, but the ground was all laid while I was there.

JCR: *Do you think Canadians are disappointed about Mexico's recent events?*

BM: Yes, I think they are very uneasy about what's happened.

JCR: *Is their approach changing somehow?*

BM: Not yet, I don't think it has. It has created —not distrust, that is too strong a word— but a sense of unease, and that there will be some kind of hesitance. Not on the part of the business community; they don't care. They care about stability, and to the extent that this adds to instability, they would be worried. I think the fact that the economy may have been badly destabilized as a result of the peso [devaluation], and all of the things around what has happened, which were probably all triggered by Chiapas, at least gunned. Starting with Chiapas, and then going into some of the economic things that occurred, with the devaluation and so on. That has actually had a profound effect on the world economy. The peso just destabilized the whole investment climate for developing countries.

I was in South Africa in February, and they were having a hard time attracting capital in the aftermath of that. They said there was a noticeable cooling of people who had expressed an interest before, because everyone is now reexamining all of the issues of political and economic stability. So, that has had wide implications, and it is not over yet. I think it had some impact on the Canadian dollar[7], but that was very marginal.

JCR: *What should Canada do in that context?*

BM: Well, I think we should stay involved as long as the [Mexican] government remains committed —and I am a little out of touch with this; I haven't been following the issues recently. As long as they stay committed to an open economy and political stability in a democratic framework, we should be there for them. If they veer from that, then we should be the first to say, "Excuse us, here, this is not the country that we signed on with. Now, these changes are not what we want to see happening."

[6] With Canada's support, Mexico became the 16th member of the APEC in November 1994. [Author's Note.]

[7] In 1993, the Canadian dollar was worth an average of U.S.$.77; in 1994, U.S.$.73. In January 1995, coinciding with the devaluation of the Mexican peso, the Canadian dollar reached its lowest level in the last 10 years when it could be exchanged for U.S.$.70. Source: *Principaux indicateurs économiques*, OECD, Paris, August 1995. [Author's Note.]