

The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy

Book by Yves Engler; 2009, Fernwood Publishing, Nova Scotia, 294 pp.

Review - Tamara Lorincz February 01, 2010

Canadians will be shocked and saddened by Yves Engler's *The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy*, a critical examination of Canada's role in the world. Engler is a Montreal-based independent journalist/activist who has written two other books, *Playing Left Wing: From Rink Rat to Student Radical* and *Canada in Haiti: Waging War on the Poor Majority* (co-authored with Anthony Fenton).

The Canadian government supplied the uranium for the atomic bombs dropped on Japan in World War II. Ottawa supported South African apartheid by allowing trade and commerce with the racist government there. With the support of its foreign service, Canadian mining companies weakened environmental regulations and propped up dictators in Central and South America. In 2004, Canada helped France and the United States overthrow the democratically elected government of Haiti.

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It was Canada's role in the coup that ousted Haitian president Jean Bertrand Aristide, a populist priest to the poor, that caused Engler to question more broadly Canadian foreign policy. "Democracy," writes Engler in his new book, "requires citizens to keep themselves informed about what their government is doing. Canadians have a right and a responsibility to know, debate and to ultimately shape what is being done in our name around the world."

Engler describes the history of Canadian foreign policy in the Caribbean, the Middle East, Mexico,

Central and South America, Central and South Asia, and Africa. Using declassified documents, government sources, and extensive research, he uncovers the darker motives and machinations behind Canadian decisions on international trade, foreign aid, and military operations.

The format of Engler's book is similar to American author William Blum's 1995 tour-de-force *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and C.I.A. Interventions Since World War II*

. Like Blum's recounting of U.S. destabilizing interventions over the last 50 years, Engler indicts Canada's corporate elite and, in particular, Canadian banks and mining companies. He documents how companies "such as Barrick Gold, Inco, Falconbridge, Alcan, Placer Dome, Goldcorp, and others, with the financial assistance of the Bank of Nova Scotia, Royal Bank, and the Export Development Corporation" weakened environmental and labor standards, displaced indigenous

populations, employed brutal private security guards, and contaminated land and water in the countries they were operating in – such as Honduras, Guatemala, Peru, and Papua New Guinea.

Engler notes that the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) aid follows Canadian corporate and military moves around the world. For instance, he discovered how CIDA funds were channeled through Canadian mining companies for their development projects in Ghana and the Philippines. Often these mining companies would not pay taxes or royalties and the Canadian government would force these poor countries to shoulder onerous economic policies, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment programs that privatized and deregulated their public services.

He also condemns Canada's military transformation to war fighting and its integration with the U.S. military. He specifically cites the deployment of Canadian warships with the U.S. fleet in the Persian Gulf and the operation of Joint Task Force 2 (JTF2)â€”a secretive special combat force that has no parliamentary oversightâ€”alongside the U.S. Unknown to Canadians, JTF2 has operated in Indonesia, Iraq, Haiti, Colombia, and Afghanistan (as an undeclared asset).

Engler concludes with his explanation for why Canadian foreign policy is the way it is and how to change it. Canada has a long tradition of supporting imperialism and colonialism, from fighting with the British Empire in the 19th century to integrating militarily with United States today. He argues that the Canadian corporate elite and defense establishment have disproportionately dictated its foreign policy to the exclusion of Parliament and the public. For instance,

Canadians were not consulted on the Canada First Defence Strategy released last June that committed the federal government to spend \$490 billion on the military over the next 20 years. Further, Engler blames the media for embedding with the military and not adequately investigating policies and actions abroad.

To change course, Engler's specific recommendations are to withdraw from NATO, cut the size and spending of the Canadian Armed Forces, and provide aid to the poorest people in the poorest countries. "Above all else it is key that Canadian aid should do no wrong," he demands.

Engler's recommendations align with Canadians' views. Last year, Environics commissioned a survey that found that the majority of Canadians believed their country should make a positive contribution and respect international bodies that provide mechanisms for dialogue and

co-operation. An internal poll prepared for National Defence, and obtained by the Canadian press, found that most Canadians view their soldiers as peacekeepers and would rather see them helping disaster victims than fighting. "While citizens of Canada, we are also neighbours to everyone who shares this planet. We must be good neighbours. That should be the underlying premise of Canada's foreign policy," writes Engler.

To be good neighbors, *The Black Book of Foreign Policy* compels Canadians to stay informed, to care, and to hold their federal government to account.

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