A Head for global affairs

Ivan Head put the Third World and the Arctic on Canada's map of foreign policy.
HIS REPUTATION precedes him: Ivan Head was Canada's Kissinger, for eight years the "special assistant to the prime minister," responsible for "foreign policy and the conduct of international relations."

Pierre Elliott Trudeau, once a globe-trotting leftist, developed a passion for foreign affairs while occupying the highest office in the land. He was the first prime minister of Canada publicly to make a special effort to improve relations with the United States.

The Trudeau-Head duo mounted a sophisticated campaign to defend Canada's Arctic sovereignty against U.S. Intrusions. Conducted a series of controversial meetings with the likes of Cuban president Fidel Castro and established diplomatic relations between Ottawa and Beijing in 1970, a move that was considered a brilliant breakthrough in Washington, which did not recognize China until 1979 under President Jimmy Carter.

Ivan Head had influence and access. A slender, fair-haired lawyer and an expert on constitutional matters and international law, he was called "the patient mystic man" by a red phone in his Langevin block office that was connected directly to the prime minister. But in 1978, Mr. Head stepped out of the inner circle, into the dark cham that divides rich from poor.

The "North-South problem is the single most pressing issue facing us," he said then, as he announced his departure to the presidency of the International Development Research Centre, a Crown corporation that supports Third World scientists in their own quest for development.

Tens years later, the IDRC still provides Mr. Head's links to the global village and his passion for Third World development is unabated — as is his fear that "the rich don't care, the problems of the poor are going to pull us all into the soup together."

"Our economies in the North are now dependent on the economies of the South," says Mr. Head, seated in IDRC headquarters in Ottawa, surrounded by the "casino and jetsam and artistic treasures of a life lived in the international lane."

"There's a net cash flow of $50 billion a year, South to North, and it's no longer for the purchase of goods — they can't afford them. They're using their cash to pay the interest on loans. My message to the Trilateral Commission (which met in Tokyo in April) was that a series of disequilibria is building up. It's unmanageable.

He sketches: Out-of-control population growth — monitored in IDC's lobby, where a digital clock flips relentlessly, adding people at the rate of 25 born every 10 seconds; today, it's 5.063,057,626. Add the mass migrations into cities of illiterate people "full of despair and anger, beyond the control of their own governments."

In this dangerous brew swim the dealers — the weapons salesmen who are, in Mr. Head's opinion, more pernicious than drug dealers; they are often times governing the world, instead of being ruled by it.

The dealers promote the spread of the arms race to poor countries, encouraging them to control their people militarily instead of educating them. The poor countries buy weapons that in many instances they don't know how to use. But they learn, and the arms race escalates. The worst poison of all — violence — spreads.

"The future of the North depends on the South," says Mr. Head. "I'm not losing optimism, but I'm losing confidence." It's the lethal combination of population growth, environmental degradation and the nuclear arms race that batters his confidence. But against the negative forces is the positive thrust of groups such as UNICEF.

He is no longer a pilot. He says that his life, work, family and politics have been "trivialized."

"Wanderlust is in his blood. His mother, Birdie Larkin, came from Prince Edward Island, descended from a Maritimes family that included the captain of a clipper ship who was lost at sea. His Aunt Belle, who at the turn of the century was widowed young, moved to northern British Columbia, ran her own business and prospered to the extent that she could vacation in Europe. This was the First World War," says Mr. Head with proud emphasis. A more contemporary relative is former Tory member of Parliament David MacDonald, now Canada's ambassador to Ethiopia.

Two Heads listed in the Canadian Encyclopedia, he observes, are no relation. "One (Sir Francis Bond Head) was the Governor of Upper Canada who caused the rebellion of 1837 and the other one (Sir Edmund Walker Head) was the Governor-General of all of Canada (then known as British North America, from 1854-61)." Their existence may explain the persistence of the false rumor that Ivan Head has aristocratic connections. The encyclopedia describes Mr. Head simply as "combative, strong-willed and idealistic."

Mr. Head was born in Calgary on July 28, 1930, the grandson of a Cockney plumber. His father, a civil servant during the Social Credit regime of Willaim Aberhart, was sometimes paid in "scrip," otherwise known as "prosperity certificates" or funny money.

Mr. Head's upbringing was neither religious nor political. He was not required to go to Sunday School, unusual in that era, and politics was "not to be discussed." This being the Depression, his mother's theme was: "At least your father has a job." Arthur Head hung onto it.

Arthur's job with Alberta Government Telephones took him into management ranks (to the heights of corporate comptroller) and in 1944 he moved the family to Edmonton, where Ivan finished high school.

"I wanted to become an airplane pilot," says Ivan. "I built model airplanes and hoped the war would continue until I was old enough to join up. But then I was shattered when a high school teacher said, 'Would you want to be a taxi driver? That's what a pilot is, a high-priced taxi driver in the sky.'"

"Unsure what to do with his life, Ivan graduated from high school at 16. His father, a working-class Brit, discouraged him from going to university "because no one in the family had gone to university." His mother, fortunately for him, "knocked down all the rules — she was an ardent feminist, she was a real get-up-and-getter." Ivan enrolled at the University of Alberta. He was a top student, captain of the track team, ambitious — but what he wasn't sure, he said, was the drive.

He figures he got his enthusiasm from his mother; from his father he got "the stamina to stick to it, to run the gauntlet without losing your enthusiasm for it."

He describes Arthur Head as a cautious workaholic who ended up with gastric ulcers and emphysema, dead at 62.

Birdie Larkin Head is still alive at 84. Typical of her exploits was an assault on the local ladies' committee that was selling UNICEF Christmas cards, usually distributed from a tiny closet in an inaccessible location where most people would be sure not to find it. Mrs. Head persuaded a department store to give her a window on Jasper Avenue.

"Holy cow," says her son, remembering the excitement. The sales of UNICEF Christmas cards exploded and it caused so much consternation that eventually

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**By Judy Steed**

**The Globe and Mail**

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For Ivan Head, the tenor of the times was very much a product of Mr. Trudeau’s leadership. “The opportunity to be associated with a guy of such extraordinary vision, intellect and discipline was incredible.”

The prime minister gave Mr. Head enormous responsibility. “He would employ me as his personal emissary to negotiate with other heads of government on his behalf. One doesn’t have that opportunity very often. To look back and think, ‘We really did those things,’ ” he grins. “Wow!”

They also fought between themselves, experiencing what Mr. Head refers to as “legendary tussles.” Is it true that Mr. Trudeau could be an “arrogant son-of-a-bitch,” as numerous critics have described him? “Yes, but his was an intellectual arrogance. He simply had no patience whatever for inadequate preparation. If you weren’t well-founded in your arguments, he could be—and often was—devastating. He would use his attack to look for intellectual weaknesses, frailties, holes in your argument. You had to stand up to him, you had to be ready to defend your positions.”

Mr. Head was comfortable enough in the Trudeau pressure cooker, but in 1978 he made the sudden move to IDRC. Again, the move seemed like the natural thing to do. “You can be a policy adviser only for so long. You have to get honest. I saw the dimension of the North-South problem: we can’t sit back and say we control technology and just pull up the drawbridge and shut it out.”

What Mr. Head refuses to shut out is “the crushing burden of poverty in the Third World. Social and political instability flow out of it. Never before have entire societies been at such risk. No matter how good we are in the North, our progress is only marginal unless our governments make major changes in relations with countries of the South.”

So far, he says, “governments of the North aren’t ready to do more than pay lip service.” But like it or not, the world is changing and those who resist, he says, “are the losers. There’s no such thing as the status quo.” Those who see themselves as defenders of the status quo “are left in the rump of history.”

What drives Ivan Head now is an urgent sense that unprecedented tragedy lurks around the corner. In the meantime, he is busy arm-twisting captains of industry and ordinary people to change their vision of the world. “We’re all in this together,” he says, smiling, preparing for yet another of an unending series of missions that have turned his life into a patchwork quilt of multiple hats.

NEXT WEEK: Overseas with the IDRC.

New military front: the Arctic

PIERRE TRUDEAU’s and Ivan Head’s concern about Canadian sovereignty is as relevant today as two decades ago. Then, the threat was represented by the provocative voyage of a U.S. ship through Canadian waters. Now, the prospects are overwhelming: the awesome power of military technology as envisioned by U.S. President Ronald Reagan in his Star Wars. The president’s Strategic Defence Initiative will be what he imagines as an invisible, magical umbrella to protect the United States from Soviet attack.

Star Wars critics — among them Canadian Nobel Prize-winning scientist John Polanyi — warn that SDI is just another, ever more deadly escalation of the arms race into outer space — and into the hinterland.

“The age of the Arctic is coming,” writes journalist John Honderich in his new book, Arctic Imperative. “After centuries of benign neglect, the once-forbidding Arctic is now the scene of developments that are increasingly drawing the world’s attention... On the security front, the Arctic Ocean has been joined into becoming the world’s newest military frontier as the two superpowers confront each other, submarine to submarine. Meanwhile, research and testing continue on futuristic lasers and particle-beam weapons for the controversial Star Wars plan, which envisages explosive-missile interception in Arctic airspace.”

For Ivan Head, these developments are downright depressing. “Every single escalation into new and more exotic technologies takes resources away from more humbly important projects,” he says. “Every escalation is harder to verify and harder to control, making the world an ever more dangerous place. And each time the arms race moves forward, we only encourage developing countries to believe their future is in military technology. History shows, after all, that anyone who believes military advances are only for defensive purposes ends up being destroyed.”