



David Gillies. *Between Principle and Practice: Human Rights in North-South Relations*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996. xv + 339 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7735-1414-0; \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7735-1413-3.

Reviewed by Kenneth Christie (University of Bergen)

Published on H-Teachpol (December, 1997)

Rights versus Realpolitik in Foreign Policy

David Gillies has produced a timely and penetrating piece of work with this contribution to the expanding human rights literature following the cold war. The text provides an informative analysis of the gap between First World rhetoric and Third World reality in human rights policy. Using different case studies to compare and contrast, the author deals with the diplomatic manoeuvring of three "middle powers" (Canada, the Netherlands and Norway) from the mid-1980s through the early 1990s, a time of great global change and one which witnessed apparent paradigm shifts in the construction of human rights policy. The most blatant example of the latter was the change from U.S. involvement with unsavory right wing human rights violators in Latin America to one of promotion of human rights concerns following the end of the cold war.

Gillies looks at the various forms of state policy practiced by these affluent First World societies to several developing states including Sri Lanka, the Philippines, China, Indonesia and Surinam. The task is to illustrate for the reader where idealistic principles and lofty words fall short of the intended consequences, even when it applies to so called "internationalist" states with a reputation for "doing the right thing." Moreover, he draws out the links between aid sanctions and their worth in developing and promoting human rights in underdeveloped countries. The argument is often made by underdeveloped countries, usually who see themselves in beleaguered circumstances, that the industrialized democracies did not show much interest in human rights until after they became affluent and politically stable. Only then did they abolish slavery and exploitative child labour and enfranchise more than a small minority of their citizens. It is therefore unfair for the West to demand that poor, politically unstable countries immediately guarantee as abroad a range of freedoms as seen in the West. Leaders like Malaysia's Mahathir have emphasised this fairly vociferously in recent years, accusing Western powers of

double standards and hypocrisy in pushing the democracy before development debate to procure their own (usually unfair) advantages in trade.

Gillies achieves his tasks in three separate but interlinked sections: theory, practice and policies. Firstly, he discusses various theories that surround human rights and foreign policy such as realism and makes an effort to construct an index measuring human rights performance. Working through an empirical lens, he shows how developed nations favour realist type solutions when their own interests clash with their foreign policy. It is not the case that these states' actions do not reflect a domestic political culture of humane internationalism that is the issue, but the fact that North-South policies remain mainly driven by commercial self interest. At the end of the day, realism is in the lead, as United States policy in dealing with China over the MFN status clearly shows. Internationalist states are then assertive on human rights issues when it suits them but more particularly when the costs are low; they are less assertive, less interventionist when the stakes are raised. The Dutch, for instance, had little to lose in action over Surinam compared to pursuing an aggressive policy with Indonesia over east Timor. Similarly, in the reaction to problems in Sri Lanka, Norway pursued a more assertive strategy than Canada. There was greater media coverage because of the sophisticated and vocal Tamil community along with high powered independent research which parliament was forced to take into account. In Canada, media attention was poor and the Canadian parliament slow to react to the issue. These kinds of mitigating factors are used to support Gillies' thesis.

In short, Gillies has produced an interesting and effective piece of work which should be required reading for undergraduates trying to get to grips with the gap between what states say and what they do in the environment of international human rights policies.

Copyright (c) 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This

work may be copied for non-profit educational use if permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu. proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

Citation: Kenneth Christie. Review of Gillies, David, *Between Principle and Practice: Human Rights in North-South Relations*. H-Teachpol, H-Net Reviews. December, 1997.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1521>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.