

Drugs and war: Edgar Bronfman views the world

A wide-ranging interview with the Seagram's boss

Liquor and banking magnate Edgar Bronfman recently proposed U.S. legalization of marijuana as an "advantageous" basis for a new "common market" between Canada, the U.S., and Mexico. His remarks were contained in a post-Camp David interview that was recently made available to the Executive Intelligence Review. Seagrams Chairman Bronfman, leading figure in the British-tied networks of the Zionist Lobby, is the author of the "Middle East Treaty Organization" proposal for the Mideast, and in the interview he detailed his economic, military, and diplomatic grand strategy.

Question: You've been particularly active in connection with recent Middle East developments. You're also identified internationally as one of the spokesmen for a policy of a Middle East Treaty Organization.

Bronfman: Yes, I wrote an article about it. It appeared on the op-ed page of the New York Times.

Q: Do you see Camp David as leading toward such a development?

Bronfman: When I wrote the article I had no idea that Camp David was even going to take place and what the results would be. It just seems that long term it just has to be in America's interest and the free world's to make sure that the Russians don't get their hands on that oil. You can talk about nuclear bombs, SALT, who has more capacity to destroy the other, but the ballgame's over pretty quickly if we can't get Arab oil. Either to Japan or to West Europe or to the United States and Canada. Somehow making that region (the Middle East—ed.) solid has to be an American imperative. It seems to me that it has to be an imperative for a lot of the so-called moderate Arabs too, because I just can't conceive of the Saudis being anything but what they are about Communism, the Russians. . . which is paranoid. I would guess that the Shah of Iran is maybe more so, maybe less so, but also paranoid about the Russians. Sadat has tried working with the Russians and it didn't work. Evidently their price was too high, too steep for economic aid and cooperation. I think probably the same thing is true for Assad in Syria. I think it's to the interest of the Western World to try to get some peace, some stability in Lebanon, a place where so many people are being killed. The one problem which we really have not solved is what we do with all the refugees, the displaced Palestinians. Because nobody really seems to want them.

Now as far as Camp David's concerned, I think it went fairly far. . . if it stays glued together and I have

my very deep concerns about that. Begin is playing a very strange role, saying things like he's not going to vote for dismantling the Sinai settlements. . . in the Knesset everybody's free to do what they want to. Now I can understand why he would want to make everybody independent and free to vote any way they want to, so that it doesn't become a party issue or a vote of no confidence, but why he should announce that he's going to vote against it. . . vote against his own agreement. . . The thing that disturbs me about Begin is that if it falls apart nobody's ever going to blame the American Administration. . . they come out smelling like a rose no matter what happens. . . Carter and Vance did an unbelievable job. If it comes apart it wasn't their doing. . . it will be because of something Sadat does or does not do or something Begin does or does not do. If Begin plays his cards carefully, then the pressure's all on Sadat. But I don't see that Begin's going to play his cards carefully because I'm not so sure that in his heart of hearts he doesn't really believe that Judea and Samaria belong to Israel even though what Israel would do with another million Arabs demographically. . . bewilders me.

Q: In the Canadian Jewish News it was anticipated that China would be playing an interesting role on behalf of Israel. Has this been a factor?

Bronfman: I don't think so, up to now. But China is changing very rapidly. China as you know has been very anti-Israel for some time. But this new regime. . . there's been a different kind of an outreach. I happen to be an officer of the World Jewish Congress. . . of which the Canadian Jewish Congress is a key part. . . and we have some feelings that it would not be impossible for a Jewish group as a Jewish group to visit China in the not too distant future. And that Red China is going to play some sort of a role. Of course the role the Chinese always play is whatever will get the Russians mad. It's very predictable. If meddling on the side of Israel will irritate the Russians, then they'll probably do it. But that's not clear yet I don't think.

Q: What do you anticipate in terms of European response to Camp David? The Europeans have been playing a maverick role in several areas.

Bronfman: Well the French are always a bit of mischief makers aren't they. They won't have too much trouble with the English, the Germans still feel guilt that we've made them feel all these years, but the French are troublemakers. I really think that the United States and I hope Canada will have to pursue

their own role directly in the Middle East and not really count on the European Economic Community to be involved. Some two years ago there was a big battle going on in this country which was eventually more or less won on the question of the Arab boycott against Jewish firms. . . but we've never been able to get any antiboycott legislation in the EEC, and it's because of the French. . . .

Q: Getting back to the Soviet question. Sen. Frank Church (D-Id), I believe, made a statement earlier this week referring to a Grand Alliance, something that would materially affect the balance of power between East and West. How is that likely to develop?

Bronfman: I think the first thing you have to have is peace treaties between Israel and its neighbors. Once you have a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, Jordan has to come along and Syria eventually. There's no way Syria's going to attack Israel without the Egyptians and Jordanians helping them. That's the first step. The second step is some kind of economic planning in the region. The third step is a kind of common market where you have no tariff barriers and have created an economic unit.

Q: Within the Middle East?

Bronfman: Within the Middle East. These steps take place slowly and then I think some kind of military alliance is possible.

Q. This is something that's being discussed in terms of North America also, I think, the mention of a common market.

Bronfman: Well I'm always for it. Any kind of equal trade. Trade is an essential ingredient in the Middle East. Just the simple fact that you don't want to bomb a country where you have your own factories. . . and people get to know each other as well through trade, and when they get to know each other they don't hate each other. . . . That's true on this side too.

As far as the energy bill is concerned, Americans, for reasons which are very difficult to understand, are

still living as if energy were cheap. Energy is very expensive. We've got to make people conservatives on energy. The only way to make people conserve is to get the price up. People are not going to insulate their homes and start using small cars and do all the things that are necessary to save fuel if it's not going to be expensive. The reason it's a political hot potato is that unfortunately the majority of Americans don't believe there's an energy shortage. They also don't believe that it should be expensive; they think the oil companies are gouging them, which isn't true.

What they don't seem to realize is what's happening to the U.S. dollar as a result of our wasting energy. Our balance of payments deficit is growing at an abominable rate, and there's no way out of this unless we start to conserve energy. Our balance of payments is I think positive \$8 billion without energy, but after energy it's a minus \$40 billion. . . .

Q: I know one of your continuing interests is Canada even though you've been a U.S. citizen for some time. There is some discussion of expanded Canadian trade relations with the U.S. which would probably become important in terms of the energy program here. I know Felix Rohatyn has used the term common market between the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Is this something that you're familiar with?

Bronfman: I'm not really very familiar with it. Intellectually I'm for it. But I think it's kind of a long way off. It would be very advantageous for Mexico, of course, if we would legalize marijuana. Certainly between Canada and the United States to have a common market would be a marvelous thing. Before Britain joined the Common Market in Europe, I used to envision that it would be great to have a common market of the United States, Britain and Canada as well as Australia — that kind of thing, but I really haven't followed this closely enough to know what the political realities are at the present time. And I also don't know how Mr. Levesque would react to the question!