

Meet MDA's David Emerson

Many Canadians were not terribly surprised when new Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, said that his cabinet included former Liberal MP David Emerson. As Minister of Industry, Emerson was responsible for the Canadian Space Agency, which oversaw the Canada-U.S. RADARSAT project.

Many Canadians are used to the cynical way that self-serving politicians switch allegiances between the Liberal and Conservative parties, since both represent the same corporate interests.

Few realize however that Emerson had been on the board of MacDonald, Dettwiler and Assoc. (MDA)¹, the US-owned company that benefited from the Liberal government's \$1.15-billion RADARSAT-privatisation scheme.

When Emerson joined MDA in August 2000, he was CEO of Canfor, which describes itself as "the largest producer of SPF [Spruce, Pine, Balsam Fir] lumber in the world."² (Presumably the firm that cuts down more SPF trees than any other, needs satellite images to locate the world's remaining forests.)

When appointed to MDA, he was also the Canadian Pulp and Paper Association's chair.³ His other positions in the deforestation field have included being chair of the Forest Products Association of Canada.⁴

But Emerson was no mere lumber baron. He had been Deputy Minister of Finance (1984) under BC's right-wing Social Credit government. He then rose through the ranks to become deputy minister to the Social Credit Premier, Bill Vander Zalm in 1990.⁵ Emerson has held many top-flight corporate posts, including directorships in B.C. Gas and the Telus Corporation,⁶ CEO of the Western and Pacific Bank of Canada (1986) and president of the B.C. Trade Development Corp. (1990).⁷

Topping off his corporate credentials, Emerson has also been vice chairman of the infamous, big-business lobby group, the Canadian Council of Chief Executive Officers.⁸

Emerson joined the MDA board on the same day as Garrett Pierce, who had just been appointed Executive Vice President of MDA's U.S. parent company, Orbital Sciences.⁹

Missile Defense

As an MDA director, Emerson must have been rubbing shoulders with at least two other top executives from Orbital Sciences, namely David Thompson, Orbital's Chair and CEO, and James Thompson, Jr., Orbital's President and Chief Operating Officer.¹⁰ Both were on MDA's board in 2000 to keep their Canadian subsidiary on track.

At some point, Emerson, the corporate lumberman-banker-politician, must have realised that MDA's rocket-making parent company was a major contractor for the "missile defense" weapons program. However, such links would not likely have phased Emerson in the least. If he was turned off by working with "missile defense" contractors, he would surely never have been appointed Canada's Industry Minister.

On November 22, 2004, soon after assuming that cabinet post, Ottawa's *Hill Times* reported on Emerson's efforts to launch a new Canadian "aerospace industry strategy." The paper noted that "Emerson says he supports talks with U.S. on missile defence."¹¹ When asked: "Do you think Canada should sign on to the U.S. Missile Defence Shield?" Emerson responded that the Liberal's had already:

"announced that Canada would enter into discussions with the U.S. about possible participation. I support this process.... *As Minister of Industry, I am aware of the potential industrial cooperation opportunities for Canada associated with BMD [Ballistic Missile Defense]. We have an active and diverse aerospace and defence industry in Canada, and we are currently assessing the extent and type of potential opportunities for Canadian companies.*"¹² (Emphasis added.)

Note that Emerson did not say the government was 'assessing' whether or not there would be any Canadian corpo-

This former high-ranking BC-Social Credit bureaucrat, then Liberal Minister of Industry, is now the Conservative Minister of International Trade. In 2000, he was a Director of MDA, the firm benefitting from the Liberal government's \$1.145-billion RADARSAT privatisation scheme.



Seen here being confronted by Haiti Solidarity activists, July 10, 2005.

rate role in "missile defense," but the "extent and type of potential opportunities" for Canadian corporations.

Conflict of Interest?

In the same *Hill Times* interview, Emerson used his platform as Minister of Industry to unashamedly plug his former company, MDA, by saying:

"there are some critical companies, with truly leading-edge technology.... In my home province of BC, for example, MacDonald, Dettwiler and Associates is a world-class space company, making a significant contribution in the Lower Mainland, as well as to the provincial and national economies."¹³

Minister Emerson has appeared to be in a conflict of interest over other matters relating to his former links with RADARSAT. When Prof. Michael Byers of UBC's Liu Institute for Global Issues, testified before a Parliamentary Committee regarding Bill C-25 (the "Act governing the operation of remote sensing space systems," aka the "RADARSAT Bill"), he said that Emerson: "is one of the four cabinet sponsors of Bill C-25. Committee members should be aware that in 2000, Emerson served as a member of the board of directors of MacDonald, Dettwiler Associates, the owner and operator of RADARSAT-2 and the parent company of RADARSAT International.... Emerson thus served on [MDA's] board of directors during the same year that the company secured \$167 million in federal gov-

ernment funding for RADARSAT-2. This was additional funding.”¹⁴

At that point in his testimony, a Liberal MP (Dan McTeague) interrupted Byers to say that his comments “should be stricken [from the record]. This is ridiculous.”¹⁵ Byers, however, continued:

“As a professor of law and...political science, I’m identifying that there is an appearance of bias.... Mr. Emerson would serve the purposes of this committee if he were to withdraw as one of the four cabinet sponsors of this bill.... Opposition members of this committee might wish to recommend to Mr. Emerson that he avoid the slightest possibility of an appearance of bias here.”¹⁶

Other conflict of interest allegations have also been made against Emerson by the National Union of Public and General Employees¹⁷ and Duff Conacher of Democracy Watch.¹⁸

Some might even say it smacks of conflict of interest to run a high-profile election campaign under the Liberal banner and then, once elected, change parties in order to get a cabinet post in the Conservative government.

“As Minister of Industry, I am aware of the potential industrial cooperation opportunities for Canada associated with BMD [Ballistic Missile Defense].

We have an active and diverse aerospace and defence industry in Canada, and we are currently assessing the extent and type of potential opportunities for Canadian companies.”



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Meet Mark Garneau: Expert on Space, PR and Weapons

Canadian hero, Mark Garneau, who headed the Canadian Space Agency (CSA) from 2001 until late 2005, was probably RADARSAT’s greatest cheerleader calling it the CSA’s “greatest achievement.” Garneau is known as Canada’s first astronaut. Less well-known are his qualifications as a weapons specialist in Canada’s armed forces:

1974-1976: Combat systems engineer aboard “an area air defence destroyer,” Canada’s HMCS Algonquin.

1976-1977: Instructor in naval weapon systems at Canadian Forces Fleet School in Halifax. He designed a simulator for training weapons officers to fire missile systems aboard Tribal-class warships.

1977-1980: Project engineer in naval weapon systems.

1981: Helped develop an aircraft-towed target system for scoring the accuracy of naval weapons.

1983: Design authority for naval communications and electronic warfare equipment and systems.

1984: First Canadian in space, as a payload specialist on U.S. Space Shuttle Mission 41-G.

1989: Retired from the Navy.

1996, 2000: Joined two other Space Shuttle missions.

Source: Biographical Data, NASA

www.jsc.nasa.gov/Bios/htmlbios/garneau.html

2006: Lost his bid to become a Liberal MP for the Montreal-west riding of Vaudreuil-Soulanges.



“Canadians can be proud. RADARSAT is more than just a satellite—it is a humanitarian service that Canada provides to its communities... and to the world. It is Canada’s ‘eye in the sky’ that monitors our land and seas, helps us manage our natural resources and assists those in need when disasters strike.”

Marc Garneau, Pres., Canadian Space Agency

Source: CSA media release, “Ten Years and over Two Billion Kilometres for RADARSAT-1.” November 4, 2005.