

Lobbyist or prophet?

international forums and that prevents the government from totally ignoring their views.

Finally, the influence of interest groups is affected by the tactics they employ. The churches have pursued both direct tactics, that is to say, private, informal communications with government officials, and indirect tactics, or broad appeals to the public. While the indirect approach may be the tactics of those without much influence, the churches have tended to use such methods sparingly, usually in the context of an international conference or around a question already on the international agenda. Their ambivalence over their role as lobbyist or as prophet is in fact reflected in an ambiguity over the best tactics to adopt in their relations with government.

Within the constraints set by the realities of world politics the churches' effectiveness is thus curbed by the opposing views that the government and the churches hold on human rights. In the end, it is this clash of philosophies that prevents the achievement of anything but the most marginal victories for the churches. No one should dismiss those victories as unimportant, for often they may involve the saving of a life or the release of a political prisoner. However, the churches cannot expect government to change its ways, at least in the short run. Indeed, they should anticipate that their statements and protests will more often than not be dismissed by those in power as too idealistic, the words of a prophet rather than a political realist. At the very best such statements may contribute to the setting of the international agenda. Their real hope for the future must rest in the belief that eventually their ideals will become reality. □

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issue of human rights quite differently from one another. On one hand, the former perceive human rights violations as rooted in the structures of the society in which they occur. Any effort to promote human rights in a given society is fundamentally political in nature. By contrast, the government tends to see human rights as one, but only one, among several variables influencing the determination of its policies towards a given country. Other factors of importance usually mentioned in government statements are international trade and strategic considerations. In the last analysis, the government attributes significance to questions of human rights only in those instances in which it has virtually no other interests engaged or in which human rights considerations overlap or coincide with out commercial and security concerns.

Thirdly, access to the policy process is limited by a relatively closed, self-contained system of decision-making. The churches do maintain contact with middle and upper levels of the bureaucracy and, from time to time, communicate with members of the Cabinet. These advances towards government are, however, usually made in reaction to the announcement of a particular policy. Successful lobbying is more likely when done before decisions have been made or legislation drafted. Recognizing the validity of this argument, the churches and other interested groups have over the past three years met regularly with Canada's representative at the UN Commission on Human Rights. Through the provision of detailed and reliable information the churches have managed to exert some influence on the positions adopted by Canada at Geneva. Nonetheless, these discussions do not as yet amount to a genuine consultation and, even if they did, they are severely limited both by time and the number of items open for discussion.

Fourthly, the influence of a particular interest group is related to a number of its internal characteristics, most notably its legitimacy, the resources available to it and the tactics it employs. It is the group's legitimacy in the eyes of government decision-makers that is probably most important. Since Ottawa has so much difficulty in understanding the churches, viewing their spokesmen often as "radicals" and "idealists," their ability to obtain an open and fair hearing is clearly restricted and their influence reduced.

Prophet or lobbyist?

Thus, it has been argued, to be effective interest groups must conform to the values and standards of government politicians and officials. This obviously poses a special dilemma for the churches: if true to their beliefs, they risk being largely ineffective; while to be influential they are in danger of compromising their values. Put in a slightly different way, the churches are faced with deciding whether they wish to function as effective lobbyist, pressuring government to amend or alter its policies in conformity with church views, or whether they wish to act as prophets, adhering to their principles but finding themselves often alone in the wilderness.

Obviously, the effectiveness of the churches is weakened by the limited resources they can devote to lobbying activities. This essential poverty of resources is partly offset by the extensive and well documented information that the churches can bring to their discussions with government. Indeed, it is the breadth and accuracy of church documentation that have won Canadian churches so much acclaim in