

*The Political Officer
in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade*

Utilization of political resources

While the data is sketchy on the proportion of time political officers actually spend on core functions, it is clear such work accounts for significantly less than the officer complement would suggest. As a rule, particularly in geographic bureaux and at bilateral missions, officers have responsibilities in "non-political" areas such as business development, consular affairs, and administration. At many missions, they also perform functions on behalf of other government departments, notably CIC and CIDA. In addition, officers spend considerable time on non-core functions ranging from managing the logistics of visits to mission administration ⁽¹⁰⁾.

Some of the "mix" may be unavoidable, even desirable for professional development reasons, but the multi-tasking of political officers constitutes a conspicuously inefficient use of resources which are not only in short supply but also hard to come by.

In 1992, John Halstead observed that "What should be a core program has become a residual program, which receives only what is left after other more precisely defined requirements have been met, and which on the other hand has to carry any remaining responsibilities which have not already been clearly assigned to other programs ... In the process, political-economic officers, particularly those in missions, are left with the impression that their core work is of discretionary importance" ⁽¹¹⁾.

The situation is not cost free. Canadian interests suffer, one workshop participant observed, when resources are reduced to below the point where the department is able adequately to prepare for international meetings at which deals are to be struck, rules established, or approaches to particular global problems agreed upon. Nor is the department in a position fully to exploit Canada's international standing and its memberships in key international organizations in order to direct the process of globalization in the most desirable directions for Canada. As one individual pointed out, "In the UN, if you know what you want and go after it in a coordinated way, you can probably get it. But if you spread your resources too thinly, nothing works."

¹⁰ *One workshop participant lamented the fact that "it always seems to be the political officer who has to organize the Terry Fox run".*

¹¹ *Report on a Comprehensive Audit of the Political and Economic Relations Program, J.G.H. Halstead and W.A. Hunter, Audit and Evaluation Division, December 1991.*