



Wide World photo

Alberta's Peter Lougheed with former French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac during Mr. Lougheed's 1975 visit to Paris.

by the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China was to Alberta. Hardly that. It goes by without some group or individual representing a foreign government making an official visit to the province. Law makes visits often involve meetings with as experts. Premier, various members of the cabinet, and/or senior provincial officials. Time is spent explaining provincial decisions covering a wide range of issues such as agriculture, trade, energy and technology. Often tours of various parts of the province are undertaken, including visits to ranches, dairy farms, housing developments, coal mines, power stations and the like. Just as members of the province's overseas missions have attempted to serve and to explain, the many visits to Alberta make this a reciprocal process. As a result, it is often a direct result of one of the province's overseas missions.

Associations

All the provincial international activities, in fact, is the most extensive dimension. Alberta government officials, through participating in international professional associations, either as private individuals or as government representatives, interact with officials of many other governments, but particularly with those of the U.S. states. The result of this interaction is a significant amount of intergovernmental activity conducted throughout the entire government (in virtually all of the functional divisions of government). The above inventory leaves one with the impression that Alberta is far more active in the area of international relations than one might ordinarily expect. Of equal importance is the fact that this burgeoning provincial activity is a recent phenomenon. The areas in which the provinces

have tended to concentrate their activities, if Alberta may serve as an example, have been confined to those matters in which the provinces have direct constitutional interest. In contrast to federal involvement in external affairs, the provincial role up to this point has been relatively modest. The experience of the past few years suggests that the provincial role in international affairs will probably continue to increase as provinces recognize the significance of their participation in their own policy development.

The gradual transformation in this area of the federal system, leading to a greater provincial presence in international affairs, is similar to many other developments in Canadian federalism. There has been no grand federal-provincial conference convened to discuss the provincial role in international affairs, though such an event would not be too surprising. In this area, provincial interests and concerns vary considerably, just as they do on purely domestic matters. Given this heterogeneity, one would have difficulty in identifying anything approaching commonly-defined provincial goals. There are a few isolated instances of interprovincial co-operation, however, that should not be ignored when assessing the total impact of provincial governments. Recent co-operative endeavours by the four Western provinces with respect to trade matters is a case in point. Another example is the meeting between the premiers of five Eastern Canadian provinces and the governors of the New England states. As provinces gain experience in the international arena and as they identify their common interests, more co-operation amongst them may be expected.

New dimension

What does all of this mean for the federal system? In essence, it suggests that a new dimension has been added to Canadian federalism. This statement does not mean that there will not be periodic conflict between the Federal Government and individual provinces over various components of Canadian foreign policy or over representation at international conferences. What it does mean, however, is that, through co-operative efforts, Canadian foreign policy can be strengthened and enriched. Recent recognition by the Federal Government of a legitimate provincial role in international affairs has done much to overcome the conflict that characterized this debate in the 1960s. The evolution of a definite provincial role shows the remarkable capacity of the Canadian federal system to adapt to changing conditions.

Wide variation in concerns of different provinces