

THE HALIFAX AGENDA

Priorities

*The 1995 meeting will be the third time
Canada has hosted the G-7 Economic Summit.*

The chairperson
for each summit
is the Head
of Government
of the host country
— Prime Minister
Jean Chrétien will
serve as chairperson
in Halifax

A G-7 summit doesn't just happen. Months of planning and consultation go on before the leaders actually sit down at the conference table. Much of the early leg-work is done by a group of people known as "sherpas." They are the leaders' personal representatives who meet at least three times prior to each summit to prepare the agenda and to discuss and process questions.

At the last summit in Naples, the leaders stated that the Halifax meeting would focus on: "How we

can assure that the global economy of the 21st century will provide sustainable development with good jobs, economic growth, and expanded trade to enhance the prosperity and well-being of the peoples of our nations and the world." As part of these economic discussions, the leaders will look at the role and structure of economic institutions — the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, etc.

POLITICAL ISSUES

The political agenda at Halifax will be full also. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien has said that the Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, will take part in the G-7 political discussions on an equal basis with other members. These talks will focus on some of the current hotspots such as Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia, Algeria and North Africa, Rwanda and Burundi, and Somalia. There will also be discussion of UN reform, and global issues such as nuclear non-proliferation, drug trafficking, the environment, human rights, and migration.

At the end of each summit, a communiqué is issued. This is a summary of what the leaders have discussed and what decisions they have made. On some topics, the communiqué contains a statement of goals or principles. Here's an example from the Naples Summit of 1994: "We are alarmed by the growth of organized transnational crime, including money laundering, and by the use of illicit proceeds to take control of legitimate business... We are determined to strengthen international co-operation to address this situation. We welcome the UN Conference on Organized Transnational Crime to be held in Naples next October."

On other topics, the communiqué outlines more definite action. Here's another example from Naples on the issue of nuclear safety: "We are... putting forward to the Ukrainian government an action plan for the closure of Chernobyl... As a further step we are ready to provide for the action plan an initial amount of up to US\$200 million in grants, including a replenishment of the Nuclear Safety Account for this purpose."

For Canada, the summits are a valuable forum in which we can influence policies concerning the world's economic and political problems. By working with other nations we can achieve much more than we could on our own.

SLIMMING DOWN

The G-7 summits began as informal, low-key get-togethers. In recent years, they have become somewhat extravagant mega-media events; the press corps in attendance numbers in the thousands.

With all those reporters, each with stories to file, economic summits can look like media circuses. The vast quantity of words generated by the reporters is often out of proportion to the actual events. This can lead to the perception that there's a lot of fuss made about very little. With so many information-hungry media types in town, it's hard for the hosts to resist the temptation to spend lavishly to create a favourable impression. The cost of hosting a summit can be enormous. At the 1993 Tokyo Summit, 36,000 police officers were needed for security; 3,000 accredited journalists had to be looked after at the 1991 London Summit; the 1989 Versailles Summit was tied into lavish celebrations for the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution.

However, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien wants the Halifax Summit to be a more modest affair. He promises the meeting will be a slimmed-down gathering, perhaps returning to its original purpose — a place where the world's leaders can discuss issues of mutual concern in an informal and relaxed atmosphere. The Halifax Summit will be more businesslike and less ceremonial than some of those that have gone before. And, the leaders will have more time for informal discussions.