

members who showed an interest in foreign affairs in the caucus or asked for a position on the committee were normally regarded as automatic members. Remaining vacancies were filled by whomever the whip decided upon. These conscripts were expected to attend only when required to do so. At any given time about one third of the members have been keenly interested, one third somewhat interested in selective issues and the remainder very definitely uninterested. Over the years there has been little interchange among these three groups though some would display considerable interest on particular issues. Those who were active at the beginning of their parliamentary career remained so throughout and few joined their ranks along the way.

Some, who joined the committee in the expectation that they could affect policy, were soon disillusioned by the prospects. They could advise and monitor but very seldom change policy. Most of the active members give more importance to the committee's role in eliciting information and providing a forum for promoting a greater public interest in international affairs.<sup>28</sup> It is for that reason that several active members are often more content to place their viewpoints on the record than to ask questions. Similarly, no member seriously believes that through the committee's work a handle can be kept on departmental spending, yet they all acknowledge that to remove even the perfunctory examination of the estimates from the committee would lessen the Government's accountability to parliament.<sup>29</sup>

In the mid seventies the committee acquired a new function. Opposition members who disliked the slowness with which they received answers to their questions on the order paper resorted to the committee to get their answers. Beginning with two Conservative members in 1975 a number of others now routinely use the committee as a means of presenting lists of questions to the minister or his officials in expectation of a speedy written reply. Before the committee they could hold the minister accountable and obtain more thoughtful and detailed replies. In general, they have been satisfied with the replies that