

Parliament and External Affairs

Parliament and External Policy

The role of Parliament in the control of Canadian external policy has been irregular and ambiguous. In theory, Parliament is powerful, being the responsible body in the government of the nation, exercising control over the executive branch. In practice, it has often been weak and inactive, abdicating its power to the executive branch of the government, i.e., the Ministry.*

Allowing for difficulty of Parliament, as an institution in which more than one House exists and more than one Party exists, Parliament possesses powers of control over its own executive, the Cabinet or Ministers. It can exercise this control in a number of ways. It can ask questions, which the Ministers are expected to answer. It can introduce resolutions, or amendments to government resolutions. It can request statements by a Minister of the Crown, which it can query. It can debate issues of foreign policy

* There is a considerable literature on the role of democracy, public opinion, and parliamentary organs in the direction and control of foreign policy. One of the latest and most succinct studies is Max Beloff's Foreign Policy and the Democratic Process, (Johns Hopkins, Baltimore, 1955), being one of the series of Albert Shaw Lectures on Diplomatic History given in 1954. Beloff quotes many other American and British authorities, but entirely omits Canadian references and examples. The Canadian aspect is dealt with in the present review.