

Of course the problem here is more fundamental than the issue of the use of the business council vehicle. Most governments tend to rely upon private sector complaints in identifying market access problems. This may be appropriate for the large and dense economic relationship with the United States, where many large and small enterprises are involved. Yet this source of advice for markets outside the United States may be seriously deficient. In many instances, large foreign multinationals with operations in Canada, or even Canadian based multinationals, may seek support with advocacy of market access problems from other countries such as the United States or the European Community, where they have substantial operations. In some such cases, the results may be beneficial to Canadian interests, but in other cases the result could be arrangements which discriminate against Canadian interests. For smaller Canadian based enterprises who are operating in offshore markets, there may be a tendency to tolerate market access problems, either because they see the payoff from obtaining changes in market access as too uncertain and protracted to be worth pursuing, or because having learned to operate within the idiosyncrasies of particular markets they acquire a vested interest in the status quo.

This does not, of course, mean to suggest that all geographic business councils as tools of trade promotion or as vehicles for acquiring intelligence about market access impediments are doomed to failure. Indeed, there are examples of successful international trade business councils, although it should be noted that there appears to be increased viability if the council is country specific such as the Canada-Japan Trade Council or the Canada-China Trade Council (which also receives federal government funding) rather than geographic. In general, it can be concluded that given the tighter fiscal environment of the 1990s and with the types of strategic market intelligence required by the Canadian business community in order to promote its higher value-added goods and services, the geographic business councils which have provided useful logistics services and networking activities are unlikely to be the most effective primary vehicle to ensure advocacy of Canadian market access interests.

In terms of the trade policy/trade development interface at the private sector level, it is interesting to note that the same two solitudes exists as in the public sector. At the Chamber, the International Affairs Committee was responsible for getting "policy" as opposed to "trade promotion" feedback from the Canadian business community. However, because like the ITAC and the SAGITs the International Affairs Committee requires a measure of consensus, the Committee has been most effective in developing positions on broad horizontal issues like the negotiation of NAFTA and the Uruguay Round.

What does the above discussion of business government-interface portend for the future of Canada's international business promotion? Will a completely new structure of business development be required and will new agencies have to be created? Or, will we have to have a better coordination of the programs and services offered by existing institutions? What will be the trade commissioner's role in this new system?