

N.D.P. accounted for four and the Progressive Conservatives for one. There have also been two emergency debates -- one on the destruction of the KAL airliner, and on Grenada. Whether this record gives appropriate weight to foreign affairs is open to debate, and I will return in a moment to the Government's role in providing opportunities for debates. However, it should be absolutely clear that the opposition can seek a vote of the House on any foreign policy issue and that the result can be quite important. Here I particularly have in mind the question of cruise missile testing. It is sometimes overlooked that a motion opposing the testing of the cruise missiles was put to the House on an Opposition Day and defeated 213 to 34. So that is a way that Parliament can express itself in the field of foreign affairs like other fields of governmental responsibility.

The Standing Committee on External Affairs and Defence (SCEAND) has additional opportunities to scrutinize Government operations. The referral of the estimates and, under the rules in operation since 1982, various annual reports means that SCEAND now may study virtually any issue it wishes. Whether these opportunities will be used by Members of the Committee depends of course on the committee work load and press of other business on Members' time.

Partisanship

Perhaps I might inject here a comment about partisanship. I suspect that some participants at this Conference will argue that the quality of Parliament's contribution suffers from an excess of partisanship -- that too much energy is devoted to ferreting out real or imagined sources of political embarrassment, while too little is devoted to serious work aimed at improving Canadian policies.

In my view it would be quite wrong to deny the central role of political struggle among parties. It is one of the most creative forces at work. To be sure, I attach great importance to broad consensus on Canada's major international commitments -- membership and support for NATO, our pledge to assist the developing world, our advocacy of respect for human rights, and so on. But I place little faith in the view that all reasonable people must agree on everything or that policy should be formulated on the basis of the lowest common denominator. The valid criticism of partisanship is not that it is bad in itself but that excessive partisanship tends to focus attention on the trivial and to trivialize the important by neglect. In the process, it discourages thorough discussion, inhibits a more productive relationship between parliamentarians and Government departments, and generally attracts the disapproval of observers