

V Public Affairs

The public affairs responsibilities of the Department of External Affairs reflect the increasing importance of public opinion, both at home and abroad, in the attainment of Canadian foreign policy objectives. In dealing with countries with representative governments, the attitudes of particular segments of the population can be decisive in moulding the course of governmental action. Even in closed societies governments often show sensitivity to public opinion both in their own and in other countries. In addition, the variety and complexity of the national and international communications media not only provide those responsible for Canadian Government public relations abroad with an opportunity for greater productivity but also impose on them an obligation to display greater professionalism.

The Bureau of Public Affairs endeavoured during 1975 to develop further a headquarters organization which would, on the one hand, administer a program of information and day-to-day public relations both at home and abroad and, on the other, develop through cultural and academic relations the longer-range promotion of mutual understanding between Canada and specified foreign countries. From the perspective of posts abroad the resultant range of public affairs tasks includes obtaining maximum public affairs benefit for Canada from the co-operative local efforts of all departments and agencies, provinces, private organizations, businesses and citizens; ensuring the most favourable possible response to or understanding of Canadian policies, attitudes and achievements from priority audiences and influential individuals; reflecting internationally the growing creativity and scope of Canadian culture and learning as a means of deepening relations between Canada and the countries concerned.

Academic Relations

A major responsibility of the Bureau of Public Affairs, carried out under the aegis of the Academic Relations Division, is to co-ordinate and promote relations between the Department and members of Canada's academic community and other groups with an interest in Canadian foreign policy. In addition, the Bureau deals with organizations interested in the study and discussion of international relations and in the long-term formulation of Canadian foreign policy. The objective is to establish and develop lines of communication between officials responsible for implementing foreign policy and scholars and others who are concerned with the many aspects of policy analysis and international relations. A second such responsibility is the encouragement and development of programs of Canadian studies abroad.

Foreign service visitors

One valuable form of exchange has been the seconding of senior foreign service officers as "visitors" to Canadian universities. Under this program, officers, freed from departmental duties for an academic year, devote their time to research, teaching, writing and holding seminars and consultations on international relations under arrangements worked out with the host universities. At the outset, two foreign service visitors were designated, but in 1972 the number was increased to three. In 1975, three were appointed to Manitoba, Western Ontario and Laval Universities. Another senior officer is a visiting fellow at the Centre for International Relations at Queen's University.

Departmental speakers' program

Under this program, foreign service officers address university audiences and other groups, attend conferences on foreign policy, and participate in international affairs seminars. In 1975, over 75 officers accepted one or more invitations to visit some 45 universities and about 35 other groups. This program has been successful not only in disseminating information about Canadian foreign policy but in exposing departmental officers to different perspectives, ideas, questions and informed criticism.