

DON HOYT

New Brunswick's Role At February Summit

There was something less than joy and thunderous applause in some quarters of the provincial government about a December column I did questioning why New Brunswick was going to a summit of French-speaking countries in February.

It got me an offer from Francois Rioux, director of cultural relations and co-operation in the Department of Tourism, Recreation and Heritage, to sit down and chat about New Brunswick's participation.

The main thing he wanted to disabuse me of was the notion that the province is attending the summit as a French-speaking nation.

We are, he said "a participating government" which means New Brunswick can intervene freely on some matters while others are the domicile of the Government of Canada.

"On certain topics," says Rioux, the New Brunswick government can talk as a participating government, on others it cannot. They will be dealt with by Canada.

"Foreign policy is a question for Canada but there are areas of jurisdiction which are provincial (education and culture, for example).

"The agreement with Canada sets the parameters of the role of New Brunswick and Quebec."

Established In 1971

The summit is an outgrowth of l'Agence de cooperation culturelle et technique (Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-Operation), an organization of French-speaking countries established in 1971. New Brunswick became a participating government of the agency in 1977 and the same rules apply there as at the summit.

"New Brunswick does not have a vote at l'Agence, the vote is a Canadian one. All three parties — Canada, New Brunswick and Quebec — must

agree on a vote before making any motion. If one of the three disagrees, then Canada abstains from the vote. With French-speaking countries, there are few votes, it's mostly by consensus."

New Brunswick's delegation (of still undetermined size) is expected to be headed by Premier Richard Hatfield. He and Premier Robert Bourassa will flank Prime Minister Brian Mulroney with name plates reading Canada, Canada-New Brunswick and Canada-Quebec and the flags of Canada and the two provinces displayed.

The Feb. 17-19 summit is the first to be held. It has been a concept talked about for 15 years which originated with a former president of Senegal

A Way Of Helping

"He saw it as a way of helping dialogue between north and south. His premise was based on the fact that the development of the Third World cannot be accomplished by economic means alone but must be accompanied by cultural co-operation."

Rioux believes that Mulroney's invitation to join the summit as a participating government puts New Brunswick in an advantageous position.

"The more you are known, the better it is all the way around. Philosophically, whether you are in a situation of prosperity or difficult economic times, you cannot close yourself in.

"You must reach out to get expertise and technology and you must give out also."

New Brunswick, he says, has benefited in many ways from its position in the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation.

In 1985, a fisheries seminar in Shippagan attracted representatives of about a dozen Third World countries to discuss various aspects of fisheries co-operatives.

"From that seminar, the agency during its last general meeting earmarked New Brunswick as a centre of excellence as it concerns fisheries. The agency will refer itself to New Brunswick in the area of fisheries before going anywhere else."

Attended Seminars

Also last year, a dozen New Brunswickers, mostly from government and universities (including an anglophone archivist just learning to speak French) attended seminars at an establishment maintained in Bordeaux, France, by the agency.

Subjects covered in the seminars deal chiefly with government administration and range from communications and urban planning to the computerization of libraries and preventative medicine.

And at the agency, as it will at the summit, New Brunswick participates "within the Canadian umbrella," says Rioux. "We are not into a war of flags."

About 40 heads of government are expected to attend the Paris meeting and Rioux points out that Canada and New Brunswick will not be the only governments representing bilingual populations.

One country likely to be in a similar position as Canada is Belgium which, like New Brunswick, has one government but recognizes the existence of two linguistic communities (the Walloons and the Flemish). Several of the countries, he adds, are bilingual in character, among them Martinique, Dominica, Egypt and Cameroun.

Major Topics

On the agenda are three major topics — world politics, economics and development and culture.

"The first two," says Rioux, "are responsibilities of the federal government, especially the first. The provinces could intervene with the concurrence of the federal government. In the third area (development and culture) they can intervene freely."

Issues in which New Brunsw-