

I would not like to suggest that at a certain hour on a certain day all this stopped and we suddenly realized that Canada's foreign interests could no longer be adequately protected through multilateral activity and by relying on our special relationship with our great southern neighbour. Mike Pearson foresaw it and we began to see in practice that even Canada was not immune from having its own vital national interests in the external area, and that these could at times be quite different from those of the United States, or our NATO partners, or even from any grouping within the United Nations. As Canadians came to realize that they had a direct individual interest in what was done on their behalf outside the territorial limits of Canada, I discovered when I took over this portfolio some five years ago, that not only the Canadian public, but even some of my colleagues, were taking an unaccustomed interest in activities that had traditionally been very largely the concern of my predecessors alone.

For example, the only promise made by the Trudeau administration in the election campaign of 1968 was to review our foreign policy and in particular our position in NATO and to negotiate for recognition of the People's Republic of China. After the election we set about to fulfil that promise.

Looking back five years I am free to admit that we in the Government were a bit ham-handed in the way we handled the NATO issue but it was fortunate that we made our mistakes early and had time to profit from them. The intention was clear: we wanted to involve the public in the decision-making process. We actively sought the views of the academic community, of Members of Parliament, of groups like the CIIA. We invited the House of Commons Committee on External Affairs and Defence to make a report. I personally spoke throughout the country explaining NATO and the terms for Canadian membership.

It all sounds reasonable enough except that there was very little leadership from the Government. In fact the trumpet spoke with a most uncertain sound; publicly I advocated continued membership in NATO; publicly my then colleague, Mr. Kierans, advocated withdrawal. The result was that our consultations with the public lacked focus. This was particularly true of our consultations with the academic community who wanted some Government position to criticize; they were not accustomed to being asked to formulate policy.

In the end we reached a reasonable and acceptable decision to continue in NATO but to reduce the numbers of our troops in Europe.

In retrospect it would have been preferable to have given an early indication of the government's thinking - a sense of direction - and to have avoided the impression of division and inactivity. To put the matter bluntly, we should have reached agreement in Cabinet, at least in principle, before seeking the reaction of the public. This, I suggest, is basic to our form of responsible government in a parliamentary democracy.

After that experience with handling the NATO question, we followed a different procedure. Recognition of the People's Republic of China was a case in point. From the outset we declared our intention to negotiate to