

Lobbyist or prophet?

stitutions. And yet, in a very real sense, these activities have a bearing on government policy, even if only an indirect one.

By virtue of their involvement in certain countries, private Canadian institutions help to sustain practices which the Canadian government itself has condemned. Whatever form the activities take, the result is inevitably

Over the past nine years Protestant and Catholic Churches have established a number of "coalitions" to channel their resources into programs to promote human rights. The most important of these include: **GATT-Fly**, set up in 1973 to assist the churches in their challenge to the existing unjust economic order; the **Interchurch Committee for Refugees**, formed in 1980, among other things, to coordinate ecumenical review and proposals for Canadian government policies related to refugees; the **Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America**, developed in 1976 to focus attention on the ongoing struggle in that region of the world for a just order; the **Taskforce on the Churches and Corporate Responsibility** created in 1974 to express the churches' concern for the negative impact our corporations and financial institutions, as well as the governmental agencies that support them, have on disadvantaged groups in Canada and abroad; **Project Ploughshares**, set up in 1976, among other things, to awaken an interest in the social and economic effects of the arms race and militarism; and finally, the **Inter-Church Working Group on Africa**, founded in the fall of 1981 to assist the churches to see their own role and that of Canada more clearly.

the granting of financial assistance and the provision of moral legitimacy to regimes which openly violate human rights. In focussing attention on this adverse impact by Canadian businesses the churches endeavor to convince our corporate leaders that foreign investment does not necessarily ameliorate the human rights situation, that extending credit to repressive regimes may well help to keep them in power. The churches as a last resort often raise the issue at the public level by posing questions and introducing resolutions at annual shareholder meetings.

In sharp contrast with the government, the churches contend that the actions of the private sector cannot be treated in isolation from government policies and interstate relations. What our private institutions do abroad can strengthen, undermine or affect in other ways what the government's policies seek to achieve. The relationship may be entirely fortuitous but nonetheless significant. At the very least, the churches argue, the government must resolve any ambivalence that exists between its stated policies — of eliminating apartheid, for example — and the behavior of Canada's domestic institutions abroad.

Evaluating the product

How effective have these efforts been? Short of having the government's own evaluation the observer is reduced to attempting his or her own or to relying on the churches themselves to assess their impact. Although the churches' own evaluation may either belittle or exaggerate their influence on government, their views as expressed to me were remarkably similar. Firstly, most expressed open frustra-

implemented, but to initiate a shift in a long standing policy.

Whatever level or branch of government the churches address, they do so for a variety of reasons. In the first place, they are anxious to clarify what government policy actually is or is supposed to be and to open up the eyes of government to the day-to-day realities facing the majority of the world's population. Secondly, through submissions and direct consultation the churches propose alternative policies to those presently in practice. Thirdly, the churches are anxious to monitor what the Government actually does. Through attendance at sessions of various organs of the United Nations and at international conferences the churches can keep a close eye on the government's performance and report back to their support groups at home and to the media.

Reaching Members of Parliament

Sometimes as a substitute for, sometimes as a parallel instrument to, the direct approach to government, the churches have addressed their message to Parliament as a whole or to individual MPs. The most common method used is that of the brief — carefully drafted, well argued and usually presented by a select group of church leaders. However, the churches cannot simply submit their briefs and leave the results to chance. The ground must be properly cultivated beforehand and carefully maintained afterwards. When visitors from abroad go to Ottawa, they are taken to see Members of Parliament as well as government officials. Information is circulated to MPs too, though often on a selective basis. Church leaders and church staff do meet and communicate from time to time with a select group of MPs. Individual parliamentarians have also gone on fact-finding missions organized by the churches to see the situation at firsthand. The purpose of all these activities is to develop a well informed and sympathetic audience, limited in numbers but influential. These "friends in court," it is hoped, will give a favorable hearing to the churches when they submit their briefs and encourage the inclusion of the churches' point of view in the final report.

Creating a favorable climate of opinion may involve voicing aloud, through the holding of a press conference, for example, one's opposition to government policy and mobilizing public support for an alternative. In another sense this approach refers to the educational work of the churches. For most, though not all, of the inter-church coalitions education is their central task. By sending Canadians to observe at first hand the deprivation of human rights, by sponsoring conferences for educational purposes and strategy-building, by developing study guides for use by members of the church and by publishing regular reports, newsletters, pamphlets and books, it is hoped that the church constituency's understanding of the root causes of human rights violations can be broadened and the role that we in Canada play in that process better appreciated. Only indirectly, and by a very circuitous route, can these activities affect government policy.

Influencing the business community

The final set of church activities that can be described as part of advocacy relates to the private sector. At first glance, these activities appear to be entirely different from those referred to above. The target of church policy is not the government and its policies but private Canadian in-