

How Canadians Approach Their Foreign Policy

We want to begin this report by challenging the myth of Canadian insularity. Basing his comments on an international CBC survey of viewers, Mark Starowicz, producer of *The Journal* and a participant in the committee's panel on the media and foreign policy, told us: "Canadians are interested in international affairs. They are more interested in international affairs than most people in the world." (20:7*) Issues of war and peace, trade, development and human rights are no longer the exclusive preserve of a small elite: they engage the hearts and minds of Canadians.

The evidence is all around us, in the size and intensity of the disarmament debate, in the extraordinary response of Canadians to the Indo-Chinese boat people and to the African famine. Our experience on this committee revealed that the foreign policy constituency in our country is larger, better organized and far more active than ever before. Hundreds of Canadians took the time and trouble to make submissions to the committee. During our hearings across the country we were able to meet only a few of the many Canadians who wrote to us.

Why the growing interest? Part of the explanation lies in the changing experience of Canadians. They are better educated than their parents and travel far more. Thousands of Canadians have served overseas in the armed forces and as development workers. Business people now have well established international connections and commute around the globe. Canadian students abroad and foreign students in Canada have widened their own and others' horizons. Direct experience of this kind has been amplified enormously by the power of television to reach out into the world for images and place them before people in their homes. All of this has radically, if gradually, reduced the sense of remoteness that used to attach to international affairs. The world is now always on the threshold of our consciousness.

The multicultural character of Canada has also affected the foreign policy agenda. In the years since the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe, unhappy developments in that part of the world have been of particular concern to Canadians of Eastern European origin who have pressed the government to support the reunification of

* Throughout the report, references to testimony are cited as follows: the number before the colon indicates the issue number of the *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence* of the Committee. The number after the colon is the page number in that issue. Thus, 20:7 refers to page 7 of issue number 20. Where there is only one number cited, it refers to the page number in the witness's brief.