

## Hugh Keenleyside On the Fragile Bridge of Hope

When the United Nations began to organize its technical assistance activities systematically in the summer of 1950, it turned to a Canadian with an impressive amount of experience in administration. As a young foreign service officer, Hugh Keenleyside worked in Japan in the 1930s and was the Canadian ambassador to Mexico from late 1944 until 1947. During the war he had been head of the American and Far Eastern Division of External Affairs. When, in 1947, he returned from Mexico, it was to take up the most desirable post of Deputy Minister of Mines and Resources.

His first mission in technical assistance for the United Nations came in April 1950, when he led an economic survey of Bolivia. It proved to be an eventful five-month expedition, for he and his team were literally caught in the cross-fire of a general strike. An important part of the mission's proposals was the recruitment by the UN of "administrative assistants" from various countries who could give strength to the Bolivian public service which suffered from inexperience as well as frequent (and violent) changes of government. As Keenleyside records: "Our mission's scheme was subsequently tried elsewhere by the United Nations and, after active endorsement by Dag Hammarskjöld, was finally embodied in the OPEX (provision of operational and executive personnel) program of the United Nations."

When, later in 1950, the Technical Assistance Administration (TAA) was being organized at UN headquarters, Hugh Keenleyside was offered the post of director-general. TAA was the operating arm of the new Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance (EPTA) and was charged with providing assistance in economic development (except agriculture, the preserve of FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization]), social welfare (except health and education) and public administration. As events unfolded, he was TAA's only director-general, because TAA was abolished in 1959 during the amalgamation of the departments of Social Affairs and Economic Affairs and the setting up of the Special Projects Fund (which later merged with EPTA to become the United Nations Development Programme). He is proud of its productivity:

"Throughout the whole period of its existence, TAA was a very busy shop. During its nine-year life, nearly a third of all mail coming into the Secretariat came to TAA. In a typical year we handled over 800 requests for experts and 1 500 requests for fellowships. Our central staff of less than 200 persons serviced, on the average, over 600 experts recruited from some 55 different countries and working in over 65 recipient nations, over 600 fellows or scholars selected from 70 countries and being trained in more than 40 host areas, and some 20 to 25 seminars, training or demonstration centres or permanent institutes.

"In carrying out these duties, the administration normally handled funds totalling over \$7 million, processed nearly 1 000 final and 4 000 interim reports from fellows, scholars or experts, and dealt with mail at a per capita rate eight times higher than the average for the Secretariat as a whole. This would have been quite impossible for our small numbers if we had not been able to attract and hold men and women of unusual ability.... Because of my own interest and experience and because I was the head of the only unit in the whole UN galaxy charged with the duty of advising governments that appealed