

THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND  
NATIONAL DEFENCE - WHO PARTICIPATES?

1945-1983

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It has become standard fare for journalists and foreign affairs specialists in Canada to decry the lack of attention given to international affairs by our parliamentarians.<sup>1</sup> In the past, there has been very little empirical evidence gathered over any considerable period of time to sustain these allegations. Nor has there been much effort made to identify trends or to give recognition to certain members of parliament who have had a very discernible interest in international relations. (See Graph)

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This paper attempts to quantify and explain the members participation in discussions before the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence since the committee's inception in 1945. In the absence of regular foreign policy debates in the House of Commons it has, over the years, been the committee which has provided the main forum for elected representatives to express their views, to obtain information on foreign affairs and to hold accountable the department charged with carrying out Canadian diplomacy.

In an era when international affairs were very much at the forefront of the Government's activities, the Prime Minister of the day, Mackenzie King, somewhat reluctantly gave in to sustained pressure from the opposition parties for the creation in 1945 of a House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs that would supersede the moribund Committee on Industrial and International Relations. Precisely what this new committee's terms of reference were to be was a matter of some

\* The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily represent those of the Department of External Affairs.