

were too many trade offs involved to have a direct impact on Canadian policy but they did see themselves as an important catalyst in that larger public pond out of which foreign policy is made. In this way the sub-committee played an important part in developing a greater public awareness of the issues and a better informed constituency. Their study also led in part to the minister spending an unprecedented 10 days in Central America which concluded with him saying much the same thing that had been said by the sub-committee.

The controversy, however, that these sub-committees aroused in political circles partially accounts for the substantial decline in the committee's activities in the succeeding year. Neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives were anxious to open up internal divisions or allow members to go too far astray, particularly when a change of leaders and an election was in the offing. Attempts to have the committee get into a study of the Pacific Rim and peacekeeping were postponed. In 1983 the committee met only 21 times and attendance declined to 44 per cent. Some members believe that the focus has now shifted to the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee and its inquiry into the Middle East.

A change in the way standing committees operate also accounts for its declining activity. Beginning in 1983 members could no longer move freely from one committee to another. Each member was assigned to one committee on which they could function as a specialist. This meant limiting the members to 15 with another 15 as alternates. The controlling and voting power was thereby given to the 8 Liberals, 5 Conservatives and 2 NDP members comprising the new committee. Heightened competition for positions on the committee has resulted, especially for the Official Opposition which must find foreign policy, defence, trade and aid critics for the committee. Since these designations are based on power and influence within the party structure there is no longer much opportunity for an interested backbencher to find a place on the committee. Though they are not precluded from sitting in at meetings they are permitted to ask questions only if time remains after the