

Letters to the Editor

Central Agency

Sir,

Belatedly I have just read Professor W.M. Dobell's most interesting article "Is External a Central Agency?" which appeared in your May/June/July/August issue and having just lost my inhibitions as a public servant I would now like to pick a small bone with your author.

It seems, according to the article, that External fails to qualify as a central agency of government because it does not have "leadership control of, say, international commercial policy." In his definition near the beginning of the article, Professor Dobell says that a central agency must, *inter alia*, have a co-ordinating role and a leadership role *with respect to the co-ordination*. By the end of the article, however, "leadership role with respect to co-ordination" has become "leadership control". There is quite a difference.

Everyone agrees that the Treasury Board is a central agency and although there have been times when it has seemed to be exerting "leadership control" over the programs of other government departments, it has always staunchly denied any such megalomaniac intentions. What Treasury Board claims the right to do is to take the lead in co-ordinating programs that might otherwise conflict with each other or run counter to some basic policy of the government.

Using the criteria of Professor Dobell's definitions, it can be argued that External does in fact exercise a leadership role in *co-ordinating* international commercial policy with other Canadian policies in the foreign environment. It would be a simple take-over of I.T. and C.'s role for it to do more than that. Nevertheless, if some aspect of commercial

policy as proposed by I.T. and C. were to run counter to some other foreign policy interest of comparable importance, External could, and I trust would, take the matter up, if necessary to Cabinet. Whether it would win in such a confrontation is another and not unrelated question. The ability of External, like the ability of Treasury Board, to play its assigned role depends on the willingness of the government of the day to let it.

While doing some work on this subject a few years ago I used a rough working definition of a central agency as including all those performing operations of government without which there would be no state; the irreducible minimum of governmental activity. Under this rule the following functions qualified: Head of State/Head of Government; Revenue Raising/Expenditure Controlling; Administration of Justice; Relations with Other States. While these functions are almost never carried out exclusively by the agency formally entrusted with them, the responsibility remains and the minister charged with it is legally and politically answerable. It is no doubt true that on occasions External has been and is still being by-passed, just as the Treasury Board's injunctions have been successfully thwarted by ingenious and courageous deputy ministers. Where this has happened it means that the central agencies concerned have failed or not been permitted to perform their functions, not that they have ceased to be central agencies.

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Disarmament delusions

Sir,

No better summary critique of Mr. Epstein's article ("Canada's Disarmament Initiatives," *International Perspectives*, May/June/July/August, 1979) can be given than the one he himself provides: "In general, the session may be regarded as a constructive but not particularly productive follow-up to UNSSOD (except perhaps in terms of the number of resolutions adopted)." Indeed, the whole exercise in multilateral disarmament at the UN seems to be little more than a orgy of resolutions with no meaning and an approach devoid of any relation to arms control both in theory and practice. Mr. Epstein is correct in calling the return of Canada to active involvement "noteworthy". What is noteworthy about it is that it suggests the return of the "helpless fixer" and friend of the "non-aligned" image; an image which draws upon the least useful aspects of the Pearsonian and Trudeau foreign policies.

Arms control is not a multinational political goal like the eradication of disease or of illiteracy, it is a "tool of national strategy". It represents an alternative to force building as a means of achieving an overall improvement, or at least those which prevent a deterioration, in national security measured in military terms. A given country, rather than build a particular offensive weapon system, which it has reason to suspect may be nullified by the intended target country's building of a defensive system or a better offensive system, may decide instead to initiate arms control talks. If successful, there would be no reciprocal build-up and security would be assured at a lower level of costs.

While there are a number of variations on the above theoretical scenario, the main point is that those countries in possession of weapons, especially strategic nuclear weapons, can effectively limit their nations with, as Mr. Epstein puts it,