

I can offer a further uncanny example of continuity in our national preoccupations. Your annual report in that year of 1934 notes the commissioning of papers for a forthcoming conference. They include: "The effect on Canada of the recent monetary policy of the United States" and "The effect on Canada of the recovery program of the United States". Moreover your annual report for 1933 records, somewhat wistfully, that "it is hoped that someone may be found to prepare a paper on the influence of Japanese economic expansion on Canada".

So there is more than nostalgia available from a look back at the early work of the CIIA. There was in evidence then, as there is in evidence today, a deep and detailed review of Canadian interests, policies and organization in foreign affairs. And there was a clear focus on the same two priorities which override all others at the present time: our economic health, and our security within a collective system.

But let me not overstate the case of continuity. Massive changes have assaulted our country and the global system. What gives us a strange fascination with the period dominated by the First World War is a dimension beyond nostalgia. It is a disturbing apprehension of similarity, a sense of lessons to be learned: lessons from the collapse of a balance-of-power security system in 1914, or from the disintegration of an economic system in 1929, or from the political extremism and social strains which characterized the inter-war period.

Many broad themes connect us with your predecessors. I intend to cluster my remarks around one of them, which strikes me as particularly appropriate to this occasion: the situation of Canadian foreign policy within a matrix of public attention, of public interest, and public pressure.

I want to explore the assumptions which underlie this meeting, your Institute, and indeed much of Canada's foreign policy work: that the stimulation of an informed opinion on foreign affairs is a force for good; that information leads to enlightenment; that the search for concordance between what governments think, and what the public thinks, takes on vital importance in times of strain.

The first problem is that there is not one public with one voice, but many publics with many voices. Those voices may not agree. They may drown each other out. They choose different channels of information, of communication, and of pressure. They animate conflicting or co-operating institutions.

The second problem is that in society at large, as indeed in government itself, we all suffer from a limited span of attention. There are only so many issues which can be kept in focus at one time. Even to identify those issues, to spot them in the surge of information-overload, is a constant challenge for all of us.

Another question is the role of the media. I think we have now virtually reached the point where no idea, policy or event can enjoy more than the most shadowy existence unless it has been consecrated with reality by the media of mass communications. Events in Poland have the immediacy of our own living room. They are, in a word, being mediated. Events in Ethiopia, on the other hand, might as well be taking place on another planet. They are, tragically, no more than an occasional blip on the public screen.