

Preparation and Coordination of Government Policy in the United Nations

Canadian policy in United Nations matters is, of course, determined by the Government itself and not by the officers of government departments. The primary responsibility for executing it rests with the Department of External Affairs, which must ensure that action taken by Canadian representatives in all United Nations bodies is consistent and in accordance with the policy laid down by the Government. Nevertheless, the principle is observed that matters coming up in any organ of the United Nations are dealt with in the first place by the experts in the government department most directly concerned. It frequently occurs that officials in more than one department may be concerned with one particular matter. In such cases, it is the responsibility of the Department of External Affairs to see that the necessary information is supplied to all concerned and to take the initiative in working out and maintaining a coordinated policy. Because of the considerable expenditure of Government funds required for Canadian participation in the various organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations, close liaison is maintained between the Department of Finance and the Department of External Affairs on all United Nations projects in which the expenditure of public funds may be involved. Instructions to Canadian delegations on budgetary matters are normally drafted in the Department of Finance for consideration by the Government, and during recent years it has been the practice for the Department of Finance to be represented on Canadian delegations to the General Assembly and other United Nations bodies.

In the specialized agencies substantive questions are usually more technical than in the other bodies and thus can be dealt with only by the technical experts in other government departments. For instance, the primary responsibility for relations with the ILO rests with the Department of Labour; for WHO with the Department of National Health and Welfare; for the International Bank and International Monetary Fund with the Department of Finance and the Bank of Canada; for the International Refugee Organization with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and the Department of Labour, in association with the Department of External Affairs. Responsibility for the general pattern of Canadian relations with the specialized agencies rests, however, with the Department of External Affairs.

The problem of coordinating Government policy has become greater as the number of specialized agencies has been increased and as the work of all United Nations bodies, particularly in the economic and social field, has expanded, and as more and more branches of Government have been involved in United Nations activities. For this reason the Government, at the end of 1949, established an Interdepartmental Committee on International Organizations. Members of the Committee are the Deputy Ministers or their representatives of the government departments interested in the United Nations and its agencies, with a representative of the Department of External Affairs in the chair. The function of this Committee is to serve as a clearing house through which all government departments can be kept informed of the work of various United Nations bodies and major policy questions can be discussed. In this way it is intended to prevent overlapping and inconsistency and to provide a basis for a more assured and vigorous Canadian policy.