

ent. He has  
t contribu  
"While the  
gained pro  
small thus  
some quite  
as women  
antial par  
policy and  
operations  
overnment,  
" he adds  
enrich the  
cribes."

responsible for organizing Canadian participation and co-ordinating briefings for delegates attending such meetings. Two other organizations, the Research Branch of the Library of Parliament and the Parliamentary Centre for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, also provide material and staff support for Canadian delegations.

### Growth in participation

Despite the extent to which Canadian participation in these bodies has developed in the amount of time, energy and money (some \$700,000 in 1975) spent on them, they remain virtually unknown outside parliamentary circles. Aside from a book by Matthew Abrams on the Canada-United States Interparliamentary Group, there is a dearth of information about all aspects of parliamentary associations. If they are mentioned briefly in the memoirs of a particular politician or in the press, one is often left with the impression that they are little more than social clubs and that their meetings are really junkets that constitute a kind of patronage available to backbenchers who faithfully follow the party line. Such opinions are unwarranted, particularly in the absence of more systematic studies to assess the value of such meetings on the attitudes of parliamentarians. For anyone who takes the time to look into these associations there are good theoretical, strategic and practical justifications for their existence.

Perhaps the chief theoretical justification for a parliamentary association is the belief that most men have a strong desire to become better acquainted with their fellows and to know the real motives for their thoughts and actions. Conferences bring together parliamentarians from various countries and expose them to points of view they may otherwise not have an opportunity to hear. It may be agreed that more is required than a journey and a few banquets to bring about an improvement in international understanding, but in the present state of the world attempts to broaden the outlook of people in positions of responsibility should be welcomed. The associations may also be justified on the grounds that parliamentarians are in a unique position to influence governments and mould public opinion in their respective countries. The delegate who is a backbencher today may become a cabinet minister tomorrow. Years later his opinions and actions may still be influenced by knowledge acquired during these parliamentary conferences.

The strategic justification for parliamentary associations is the fact that these

bodies, despite their non-governmental nature, often take on quasi-diplomatic functions as various countries use them as a platform to advance and defend particular policies or interests. On the great international issues of the day it would be naive to expect American or Soviet delegates to disagree publicly with their own governments' policies. On the other hand, parliamentary associations provide a forum where delegates can and do lobby for the policies of their own countries. In the case of Canada, participation in the Inter-Parliamentary Union was originally, in part at least, a way of quietly working towards gaining recognition from the rest of the world as a Dominion with a separate identity despite its membership in the British Empire. Delegates sought and attained independent status at these meetings well before the colonial conferences and agreements of the 1920s. More recently, participation in parliamentary associations has helped promote the Federal Government's purpose of having Canada recognized internationally as a French-speaking as well as an English-speaking country.

There have been occasions when a Canadian delegate has used the forum of a parliamentary association to criticize some aspect of government policy, but such examples are rare, partly because the topics discussed at these meetings are usually so general that representatives from countries with extremely different ideologies are able to find common ground. Thus it is not surprising that Canadian delegates, whatever their political affiliation, usually agree on most matters. Even in very informal associations such as the Canada-United States Interparliamentary Group, there is still a tendency for Canadians to find themselves in substantial agreement on a number of issues such as China, NATO or Cuba, and in substantial disagreement with certain American Congressmen and Senators who take part. On bilateral issues, Canadians, like citizens of most other countries, see themselves as having distinct interests and, if the Government of Canada has declared itself on an issue, even the delegates from opposite parties usually try to support it.

### Unique profession

Parliamentary associations also provide practical services to the legislator as a member of a unique profession. Perhaps the best example is the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's annual seminar on parliamentary procedure at which selected parliamentarians from various Commonwealth countries come to London

*Parliamentary associations used as forum to criticize government policy*