

PUBLIC POLICY

It is difficult to overestimate the symbolic importance of political institutions in a society. The legitimacy of government action and public policy depend upon the credibility of the institutions which administer them. Clearly, if Parliament, government departments, agencies and organizations are to maintain their credibility, they must adequately reflect the nature of the society in which they are based.

The federal government has already recognized this principle of representation with respect to its role as an employer. Special programs have existed for some time to promote the participation of veterans, francophones, women, aboriginal people and the handicapped in the public service. Similarly, efforts have been made to assure a certain level of representation for women and francophones on various boards and commissions staffed by Governor-in-Council appointments. Such initiatives, while they have not yet entirely achieved their objectives, are to be commended; not only do they serve to rectify an unjust situation, they also provide a positive example for the private sector. Yet many submissions made to the Committee stressed the fact that visible minorities are perceived to be under-represented or even excluded from many of these key bodies. As a result, the Committee believes that the federal government must now quickly take action to ensure the presence of visible minorities in these very important public institutions, in order to adequately reflect the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canadian society.

In addition to being representative of its society, however, government also has an obligation to reflect the concerns of that society and, on occasion, to lead it, in the making of public policy. Briefs and testimony received by the Committee frequently referred to the inadequacy of the federal government's current multicultural policy and the mechanisms which exist to implement it. As well, concerns were expressed as to the lack of sensitivity demonstrated in the administration of some other areas of federal policy, with respect to the concerns of multiculturalism in general and visible minorities in particular.

This chapter therefore examines the issues raised during the Committee's deliberations concerning the federal government, both in its capacity as employer and as maker of public policy. It identifies several ways in which the participation of visible minorities can be increased and multicultural policy can be strengthened and enhanced.