

As I was saying in French, I am not an historian by training. I became one rather abruptly and unexpectedly, indeed a bit by accident, toward the end of 1969 when I was named head of the department's historical services. Until then, I had been—in the context of this eminent gathering—a mere foreign service officer.

At the time, the department was under attack by professors and researchers across the country for neglecting their needs for accurate information about Canadian foreign policy. The new under-secretary (the public service head of the department, whose title now is deputy minister), Mr. Ed Ritchie, had heard that I was teaching part-time at the University of Ottawa in the communications field. In earlier years, I had been a departmental press officer for a while. The directorship of the Historical Division was becoming vacant and he appointed me to the post.

It turned out to be one of the happiest and most intellectually rewarding assignments of my career and I would want him to know that. It is not often that one can have real influence in a bureaucracy, let alone create or innovate, but he made that possible for me in this admittedly highly specialized sector and I am very much in his debt. Also, I met some of Canada's most distinguished scholars and learned a good deal from them. Several became and still are warm friends.

Altogether I spent about nine years in the division, broken by two postings abroad in Washington and Tunis. There are two or three high points during those years that I would like to mention, since they have a bearing on your deliberations.

The first concerns the need for access to departmental records on foreign policy for accurate historical presentations and analyses. The second is the importance of publishing those records, of making them available in book or other form, whereby they can reach a broader public, especially in large countries where it is not always easy for researchers to come to the capital to consult the records.

I remember Mr. Ritchie's first instructions to me vividly. They were clear, friendly and to the point. He was that sort of man. "Arthur", he said, "I want you to open up our records, open the department up. If you get into trouble, I'll support you." Well, fortunately, we didn't get into trouble.

The rationale behind the decision to open the department's records to researchers was that it is far better all around to have accurate analyses and presentations of Canadian foreign policy, based on the actual records, than to have it analyzed or presented on the basis of speculation, conjecture or guesswork.