

Advocating scientific approach for diplomats and academics

By André P. Donneur

It has long been a commonplace to contrast the practitioner, who deals in facts, with the theoretician given to flights of fancy. In the field of foreign policy, the speculations of academics specializing in international relations have been greeted by diplomats with either tolerant or irritated scepticism. I am referring here to officials of the Department of External Affairs either on foreign assignment or working out foreign policy at their headquarters in the national capital.

Similarly, the average academic has long considered his foreign-service counterpart as a bureaucrat enmeshed in diplomatic correspondence, incapable of rising above daily events to conceive new policies or, at best, acting intuitively without any true awareness of the laws of reality. This mutual distrust, often tinged with contempt, has long characterized, in Canada as elsewhere, the very limited relations existing between the two groups.

All this has begun to change, however, as Geoffrey Pearson pointed out in the last issue of *International Perspectives* (November-December 1973). In the United States, many academics have contributed since the Sixties, not always happily, to the elaboration of foreign policy. In Canada, the practice was initiated some time ago of sending officers of the External Affairs Department to spend a year at selected universities. More than a year ago, this innovation was paralleled by the employment, for one year at a time, of a member of the academic community in the department's Policy Analysis Group in Ottawa.

As a matter of fact, the scepticism of diplomats about the work of academics was largely justified. The study of international relations had long remained the preserve of historians, who concentrated on selected events of the past and whose analyses were of little value in formulating current foreign policy. Between the two wars, studies in international relations had been, apart from that, the work of jurists who were seeking ways to promote peace

through the negotiated settlement of conflicts. After the Second World War, some academics attempted to describe the web of international relations in a realistic way. This period was marked by the publication of *Politics Among Nations* by Hans Morgenthau and numerous other comprehensive works on international relations.

A new approach

Beginning in the Sixties, however, many academics endeavoured to improve on these first great frescoes, now considered traditional. The scientists' hour was at hand. Important work was done in clarifying the assumptions already advanced, often brilliantly, by traditional authors, as a result of which these hypotheses could be properly tested. Instead of continuing to attribute phenomena to the vague causes suggested by intuition, variables were introduced and assessed as accurately as possible, and the reformulated hypotheses were then checked.

A number of books and articles published during the past decade bear witness to the initial results of this scientific approach. The articles appeared mostly in *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Peace Research* and *Peace Research Society Papers*, but some were published in other periodicals, either of the traditional type, like *World Politics*, or covering the whole range of political science, such as the

Professor Donneur, a member of the Political Science Department of the University of Quebec's Montreal campus, is a specialist in research on international relations and foreign policy. He was associated for a year with the External Affairs Department's Policy Analysis Group and then resumed his university post in the fall of 1973. Professor Donneur is a member of the editorial Board of Études Internationales and chairman of the research committee for the Quebec Centre for International Relations.