

Canada and Latin America in many important respects: political, economic and cultural.

A little more than a month ago the preliminary report of the ministerial mission was tabled in Parliament. I understand that you have copies of this report and that it is available to others interested in Latin American affairs. The Latin American task force is now engaged in preparing a report in which it will make recommendations to government. The consultations which we are starting today may be expected to have a direct effect on these recommendations.

In our review of relations with Latin America our starting point is a belief that it is a part of the world with which Canada should have a closer relationship than in the past. We think that this must be beneficial both to Canada and to the Latin American countries. For us, it could mean a relatively new dimension in our foreign relations; a broadening of the external basis on which our national identity rests and some strengthening of our position in international councils. There would also be economic benefits and opportunities for enrichment of our cultural life. It is not my place to suggest what advantage would accrue to the Latin American countries from closer ties with Canada but it seems probable that they too would find a closer relationship worthwhile from the political, economic and cultural points of view.

To define Canadian interests in Latin America is to state what is obvious and well known to you. There is a significant Canadian investment in some Latin American countries, and Canadian trade with Latin America - though still only a very small part of our total trade - has substantially increased in recent years. In several Latin American countries there is a sizeable number of resident Canadians, composed principally of businessmen, bankers and volunteer workers both lay and religious. But our greatest interest is in the people of the Latin American countries themselves, our neighbours who share with us a common heritage.

Canadian objectives in Latin America are not quite so easily defined. One of the main purposes of the ministerial mission was to help the government to determine the real possibilities for strengthening relations with Latin America and the best means of doing this. Similarly, part of our task at this seminar is to consider what Canadian aims in Latin America should be - in broad policy terms and in terms of concrete steps which may usefully be taken in the short term.

Limiting myself to the broad policy aspect, I might provide a starting point for discussion by outlining what seem to me to be important principles for the development of a new and more effective Canadian policy toward Latin America.