

Foreign service consolidation

by Jack Maybee

"A program for consolidation of Canada's foreign service will be started immediately", said Prime Minister Trudeau on March 21, 1980. For the departments of External Affairs, Industry, Trade and Commerce and Employment and Immigration consolidation will involve a full integration into external affairs of their foreign service officers at the senior executive level. Heads and deputy heads of diplomatic and consular posts abroad will normally be drawn from this pool. The consolidation plan will also mean that management control of foreign service personnel at the operational level—which ranks below the group mentioned above—will be divided between the departments of External Affairs and Industry, Trade and Commerce. The operational group in External will include foreign service officers from the Department of Employment and Immigration and some officers from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), as well as those already in External. In Trade and Commerce the operational group will include the trade commissioners at that level, plus foreign operations personnel from the Canadian Government Office of Tourism.

The announcement of the plan raises a host of questions. Why is consolidation being undertaken now? What are the purposes? How will they be achieved? How will consolidation affect policy formation and decision making? Will it make any difference to how Canada conducts its foreign relations? What are the prospects that the plan will really be carried through?

"We were a bit stunned by the suddenness," said an immigration official. No doubt the move was meant to be sudden. While government organization is recognized as a prerogative of the Prime Minister, well-entrenched ministers are likely to be resistant to changes which affect the size and scope of their departments. Clearly the best tactic for the Prime Minister was to act as early as possible in the life of his new government.

In a broader sense the move was not quite such a surprise. The Privy Council Office had been examining foreign service consolidation before the general elections of May, 1979. Some optional courses of action

were proposed to Prime Minister Clark after he took office, but he chose to commission a further study before deciding on a plan. Barry Steers, a former trade commissioner who had served as Ambassador to Brazil and Consul-General in New York, was asked to re-examine the problem. He rendered his report in late August, but the Clark government took no action on it before the election of February 18, 1980.

Earlier Efforts

A previous consolidation start had been made in 1970, but was not carried through. A committee of deputy ministers from the departments principally concerned, the Interdepartmental Committee on External Relations (ICER), was directed by the government to implement a decision in principle on foreign operations integration. The ICER integrated the foreign operations support services of 22 departments, boards and agencies then carrying on programs abroad, transferring about 1,000 employees (mostly locally engaged staff at posts abroad) from these departments to the department of External Affairs.

Subsequently the ICER deferred further structural integration until it had dealt with the problem of policy coordination at headquarters between departments and agencies responsible for programs with international dimensions. Some constructive measures were adopted, but momentum diminished. The ICER met less and less frequently, and never did return to the idea of further structural integration.

There were apparently two developments which inspired the Privy Council Office early in 1979 to re-examine the possibility of bringing the various components of the foreign service into a single management system. One reason was recurring complaints from heads of posts, who said they could not work with maximum efficiency and economy, because they lacked sufficient control over the manpower and resources assigned to the post for carrying out the programs of

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