

The environment battle

evaluation, of an authoritative picture of the state of the world environment.

"At the end of the 70s, it was possible to ask the same central question as at the beginning: 'Is the world environment changing in ways that could be seriously detrimental in the long-term to the well-being of humanity?' — and still not be sure of the answer."

Thus we are left with the irony that, 10 years after a world organization was set up to provide scientific data on which governments could base plans to halt environmental degradation, and after the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars, adequate data have not yet been produced.

This may or may not be taken as an indictment of UNEP and the Stockholm initiative, depending on one's point of view. However, the UNEP Report points to ways in which the lack of data can yet be filled. It concludes that

"the great problems of the world have political roots," and it notes that people's attitudes to environmental matters have changed since the early 1970s.

At the Stockholm Conference it was generally assumed that the world's governments and international agencies had the power to take effective action, and that the limiting factors in finding solutions to environmental problems were scientific and economic. Now in the 1980s people are no longer sure this is so — even where solutions to the problems are known. There has been too much talk and too little action. □

(*The World Environment, 1972-1982, A Report by the United Nations Environment Programme, Edited by Martin W. Holdgate, Mohammed Kassas and Gilbert F. White, with the assistance of David Spurgeon. Study Co-ordinator: Essam El-Hinnawi.*)

Making Canadian foreign policy

Two developments this year bring new elements into the way foreign policy happens and works in Canada.

Foreign policy formulation — a parliamentary breakthrough

by John R. Walker

As representatives of a House of Commons external affairs sub-committee wound up three weeks of investigative travel in the Caribbean Basin at the end of February, it began to occur to those who had accompanied the members that they had been present at a unique experiment in parliamentary intervention in Canada's foreign policy.

Here were Members of Parliament interviewing, in the presence of a Canadian press corps, prime ministers, presidents, dictators, junta leaders and their oppositions, all around the Caribbean and Central America, asking the blunt questions diplomats often have to mask, encountering on the spot some of the biases of Canadian policy, and expressing for local consumption their differences with Ottawa, or even Washington. But here also were Canadian MPs using up the time of busy leaders with simplistic questions, squabbling with each other (sometimes in front of foreign ministers), and sounding off to the nearest microphone assessments of complex issues on two days' acquaintance. It was the first time in living memory around Parliament Hill that a parliamentary committee had exercised such a free-wheeling mandate in the field of foreign affairs.

John R. Walker is Foreign Affairs Analyst for Southam News. He constantly watches and frequently visits Latin America.

The questions this raised were whether it was worth it, whether it had gone too far or whether it was an experiment that should be expanded, both for the education of members and for the democratization of foreign policy.

The sub-committee begins

This all-party sub-committee, chaired by Liberal MP Maurice Dupras, began last year an intensive study of Canada's relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, the first such since a Senate study more than a decade ago. It started in typical fashion with the committee listening to a parade of witnesses, academics, church groups, trade experts, and governmental officials in Ottawa. Members made a couple of quick sorties to Washington and Mexico City for further briefing, and they contracted a couple of in-depth studies from Canadian university experts.

An urgent impetus for their examination was provided by the Reagan administration's new focus on Central American problems and its rather ambiguous effort to launch a so-called Caribbean Basin Plan to which the Canadian, Mexican and Venezuelan governments had been asked to contribute in some fashion.

On December 15, the sub-committee presented its first interim report which, among other things, applauded the Canadian government's stand in opposing the use of the