

Country Data Banks

106. Much thought has already been given to this general subject by the Policy Analysis Group. In one direction the Policy Analysis Group has made a start in a project to develop sets of "country" data for some forty-one countries. It would appear from this exercise that from the External Affairs point of view information on countries falls roughly into three categories: basic unclassified data; unclassified data dealing specifically with the relationship with Canada; and classified information on policy and sensitive issues bearing upon the relationship with Canada. It seems probable that a quite comprehensive range of data could be stored through use of a computer and subsidiary devices and available for rapid retrieval as well as a certain amount of manipulation. The success of such general country data banks would depend on procedures to ensure the regular and timely input of raw material and up-dating amendments from sources both within and outside the Department. The Bureau Information Control Officers, in cooperation with desk officers, would have major responsibility in this regard under central guidance. Once well established, a system of country data banks would give External Affairs a very effective tool as an adjunct to the coordination role. This feature of the information system should also prove particularly useful in conjunction with the annual country programme exercises which now receive so much attention.

107. As an evolutionary development from "A Foreign Policy for Canadians" and the "Third Option", ministers have had occasion in recent months to consider the overall conduct of relations with the United States and have prescribed the coordinating role of the Secretary of State for External Affairs and of this Department in this most important of all areas of Canadian foreign policy. In parallel with the general country data bank concept evolving in PAG, others in the Department have been considering the setting up of a very comprehensive data bank dealing solely with Canadian-United States relations. This field is so broad and complex, and involves so many interests at the federal, provincial and private levels that it will require a major effort to make even a start. Discussions have been held with the United States Division about how the matter might be pursued.

108. Once embarked upon, the Canada/United States data bank would absorb significant effort as well as computer capacity. It would probably therefore be wise to develop the techniques first on a somewhat smaller scale, yet still calling for substantially more elaborate material than in the set of country data banks contemplated in paragraph 106 above. There immediately come to mind the possibilities for detailed monitoring of the Canadian relationships with either EEC or Japan, two entities of substantial interest to Canada. Either one of these would present a sufficient challenge for a meaningful pilot project, while hopefully providing some useful results at the same time.

109. It is envisaged that the proposed Director of Information Systems would work in concert with PAG, the Central Staff and the Geographic Divisions in devising the criteria and techniques for building up the structures of all three types of data bank.