

*The Political Officer
in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade*

In the view of workshop participants, the explanation is that "informatics are not being channeled to meet our purposes". As one individual observed, "Technology is seen as the solution, but the system is designed for the majority of employees who work in administration not foreign policy, for example the choice of a word processing program based on its functionality for the majority of admin users, not based on what we need to communicate with people outside the department". Another commented that "Uncontrolled proliferation of technology is not a labour-saving device. What they are doing now is not going to solve the problem."

ISSUES PARTICULAR TO POLITICAL OFFICERS

Staff reductions and personnel policies

During the 1990s, the department reduced the size of its personnel complement by 13% (980 positions), with the major reductions taking place abroad. The number of Canada-based staff declined by 30% and locally-engaged by 6%. But the decade also saw the department create two large new bureaux, to deal with "global and human issues" and with "international environmental affairs". In addition, the total number of missions increased by 11%. Despite closing 14 missions and satellite offices during the 1990s, the department was compelled to establish embassies in many of the 29 new states resulting from the collapse of the Soviet empire and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and to set up small offices in support of Canadian peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations (in such places as Phnom Penh and Sarajevo). Canada now has 160 offices abroad, half of which (82) are in the "small or micro" category, operated by no more than one or Canada-based staff.

As a result, political officers today represent a "thin red line" of Canadian diplomatic resources, never amounting to more than a handful of individuals in most places. Apart from EX-level officers, there are only 482 FSs in the political/economic stream which supplies most of the political officers. The 316 at headquarters are spread among some 35 functional divisions and 20 geographic divisions. Abroad, there are only 166 officers for 160 missions. The political/economic stream now accounts for only 25% of DFAIT Canada-based program staff abroad, and only 13% of the total of all departments' CBS program staff abroad. At some missions, the only "political" officer is the ambassador.

Even in larger missions, the Canadian numbers pale in comparison to those with whom Canada is competing to influence outcomes. At UN headquarters in New York, for example, Canada has 14 diplomatic and military officers at its mission, the UK and France each have 27, Germany 31, Japan 34 -- but the Canadian contingent must staff the same number of committee meetings.