

Slower
rotation
process

Fourth, we are trying to slow down the process of rotation, of alternating assignments at headquarters with postings. This will enable officers to increase their specialist expertise and knowledge of government operations. Foreign service officers are often at a disadvantage in the "interdepartmental game" because they usually serve in a particular job in headquarters for just a few years and then they are posted. It is difficult for them to develop essential contacts in domestic departments — contacts they need to alert them to emerging issues. While I recognize the serious consequences of a change in rotational personnel policies, the Department must, at a minimum, slow up significantly the rotational process if our officers are to achieve the necessary level of effectiveness in Ottawa.

The professionalism of the foreign service will not, I believe, be threatened but will be enhanced by these measures, which are the logical and essential extension of a central agency role.

I am also becoming increasingly conscious of the difficult personnel problems which now face the foreign service. In any year over 25 percent of our rotational employees are reassigned to a new headquarters position or sent to a new post. Trying to find the most suitable person for a given job has always posed problems for the Department. In recent years, however, the problems have deepened, and not only as a result of the rapid growth of the foreign service.

In many countries where we now have posts, local conditions have become quite difficult. Aside from increased dangers to health, there now exist, in a number of places, serious risks to personal security. Also, schooling in many countries is below Canadian standards. Families must often leave their children in Canada either in boarding schools or with family or friends for periods of up to three or four years. While the government does pay for schooling and periodic trips for children to visit their parents at their posts, this is not sufficient compensation for many people. The Department has always been deeply concerned with these problems, and always will be.

Another serious problem, and one over which the Department has very little control, concerns the careers of persons married to foreign service personnel. This problem primarily affects male employees with working wives, although female employees are increasingly experiencing the same problems with working husbands. When an employee is posted, his or her spouse must, in almost all cases, interrupt or give up a career to accompany the employee to the post. In recent years the problem has become acute as more and more wives pursue careers. While this is a laudable social phenomenon, it places great pressure on many of our personnel. The loss of a second income can cause difficulties; even more important, however, is the sense of loss felt by a spouse obliged to abandon a personal career because the Department of External Affairs needs a First Secretary in a faraway place. In many countries the spouses of diplomatic personnel are forbidden by law to work, or local conditions make employment very difficult. Every year, the number of personnel caught in this situation grows. I have given much thought to this problem and I have sought proposals for mitigating the difficulties. I am glad to say that we have been able to
