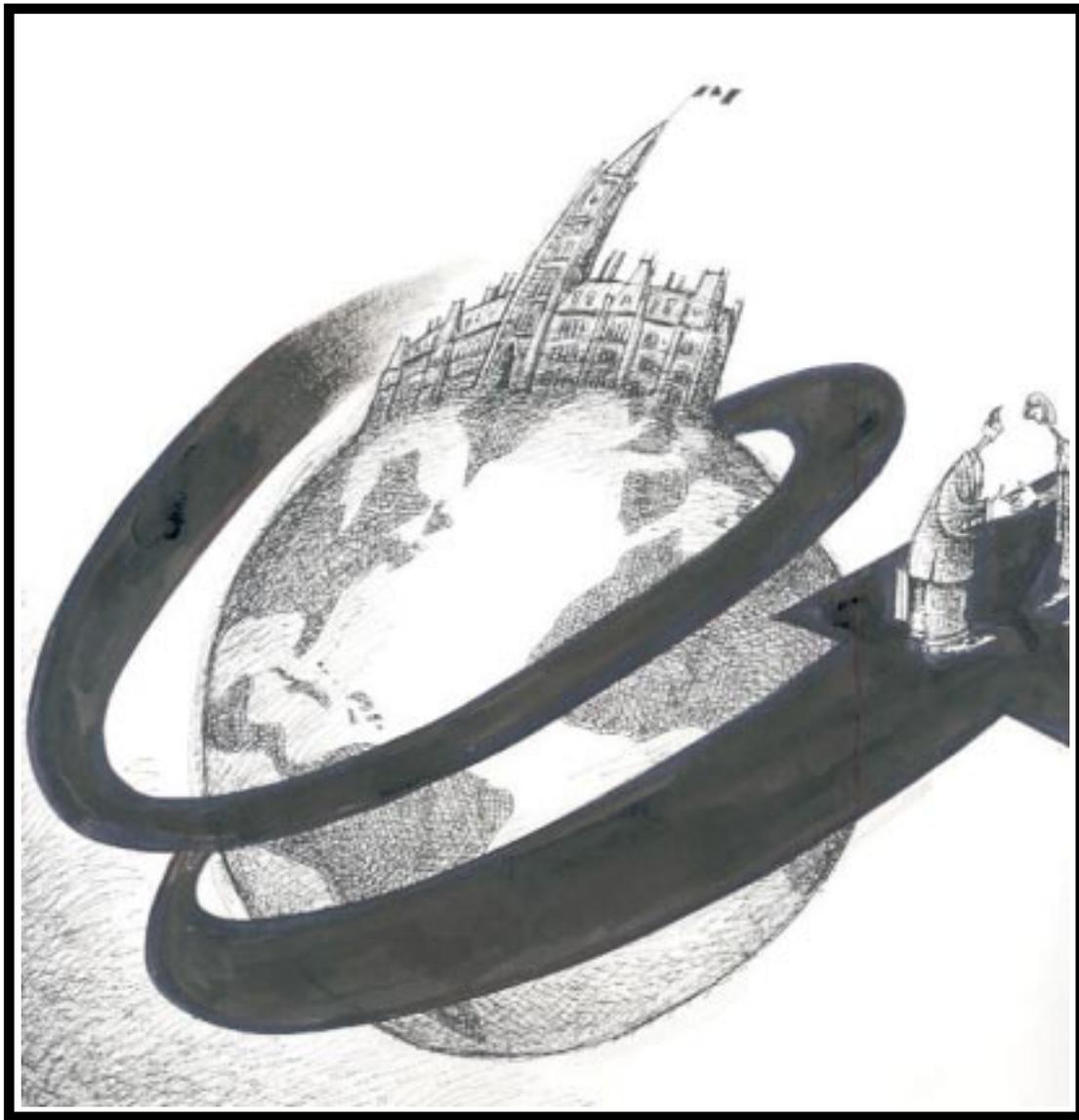


**PARLIAMENTARY
DIPLOMACY**

OCCASIONAL PAPERS ON

PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT

NUMBER 16/MAY 2003



OCCASIONAL PAPERS ON PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT

Occasional Papers on Parliamentary Government are written, edited and published at the Parliamentary Centre, an independent, non-profit organization. The missions of the Centre include: assisting parliamentarians, in Canada and abroad, to develop their understanding of external relations; helping parliaments to function more effectively; contributing to the professional development of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff; and supporting democratic development worldwide.

Editor
Peter C. Dobell

Production
Kim Caldwell

Distribution
Kim Caldwell

Parliamentary Centre

Board of Directors

Mr. David Golden, Chairman
The Honourable Raynell Andreychuk, Senator
Mr. Dennis Apedaile
Mr. Bill Blaikie, MP
The Honourable Herb Breau, PC
Mr. Brian Crane
Ms. Raymonde Folco, MP
The Honourable Jean-Robert Gauthier
Mr. Gurmant Grewal, MP
Mr. Jean-Marc Hamel
Mr. Arthur Kroeger
Ms. Anne Lamont
Mr. Richard Marceau
Dr. Keith Martin, M.D., MP
Mr. Robert Marleau
Mr. Michael Murphy
The Honourable Lucie Pépin, Senator
Mr. David Pratt, MP
The Honourable Marcel Prud'homme, PC
Mr. David J. Schijns
The Honourable Mitchell Sharp, PC
Mr. Robert Speller, MP
Mr. Greg Traversy
Mr. John Williams, MP
Dr. David Zussman

Address for copies (at a charge of \$5.00 each) and other correspondence: 255 Albert Street, Suite 802, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6A9. Correspondence concerning material appearing in *Occasional Papers on Parliamentary Government*, as well as contributions for publication, should be sent to the Editor. Comments by telephone are also welcome at (613) 237-0143 ext. 300. Material appearing in *Occasional Papers on Parliamentary Government* may be reproduced only with the permission of the Editor. All unsigned material is written by the editorial staff.

© 2003 Parliamentary Centre

Printed by: Allegra Print & Imaging, 278 Albert St., Ottawa

In This Issue...

Canadian MPs and Senators now participate regularly in interparliamentary activities, to such an extent that parliamentary diplomacy has become a recognized function of elected members. The Canadian Parliament has joined virtually all interparliamentary associations and has formed bilateral links with the legislatures of a number of countries.

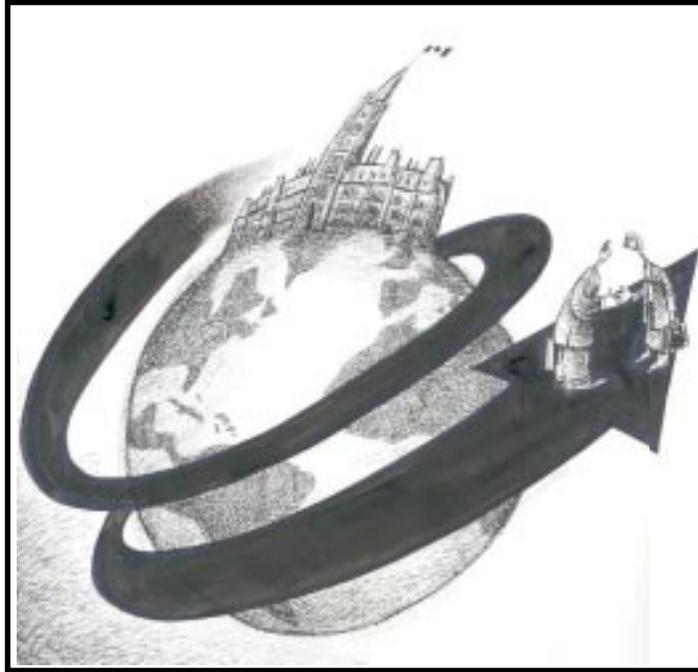
Compared to most European and some other parliaments which usually appoint parliamentarians as delegates to an association for the life of their legislatures, the practice in Canada is to appoint delegates a year at a time. As a result, save for the elected heads of Canadian branches of interparliamentary associations who are generally re-appointed each year that they hold that position, few other Canadian members have the opportunity regularly to attend meetings of an association over several years. Without this experience it is very difficult for members to become well acquainted with delegates from other countries, to learn about the issues that the organization deals with and to become familiar with the procedures of the association.

If some members with a demonstrated interest were appointed for the life of a Parliament to represent Canada at an association, they should be able to promote Canadian interests in that organization. It should also provide them with a rewarding career path. This proposal and a number of others are offered in this issue of the magazine in the hope of strengthening Canada's participation in interparliamentary activity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Parliamentary Diplomacy: A Career Path for 3 some Members of Parliament?	
The Growth of Inter-parliamentary Activities 5	
The Situation in Canada 7	
a) Inter-parliamentary Associations 7	
b) Bilateral Associations 9	
c) Other Opportunities 10	
Innovative Ways to Involve Members in 13 Parliamentary Diplomacy	
Conclusions and Recommendations 15	
Annex A: Inter-Parliamentary Associations 17	
Annex B: Friendship Groups 18	

Cartoon by Anthony Jenkins



PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY

A Career Path for Some Members of Parliament?

Diplomacy used to be the preserve of the Executive. While Members of Parliament occasionally debated foreign policy issues, they lacked opportunities for personal involvement. That is no longer the case. Canadian Members now regularly meet in many international forums, exchange views with colleagues from other legislatures and occasionally are even invited to in a personal capacity to study a situation abroad or take part in diplomatic missions.

The principal vehicles in Canada for what has become known as parliamentary diplomacy are six inter-parliamentary associations and five bilateral associations, all of which are funded by Parliament. (The eleven associations are listed in annex A along with the some other inter-parliamentary and bilateral groups that are comprehended for administrative and budgetary purposes under one or other of the associations). These bodies hold one or more plenary sessions each year as well as organizing study visits by committees and other events. Within Parliament there are also three official friendship

groups and some thirty unofficial friendship groups, none of which are funded by the legislature. In addition Members of Parliament may gain international exposure through travel abroad undertaken by standing committees. A novel organization, the Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption, has ambitious plans for setting up networks of parliamentarians to pursue regional policies for combating corruption. Finally, a number of NGO's undertaking democratic development programs invite Members of Parliament to participate in suitable program activities abroad. As a result of all these developments, the opportunities for legislators to engage in parliamentary diplomacy have expanded rapidly and substantially.

In April, 2002, Bernard Patry MP, the chair of the Canadian Branch and vice-chair of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie Association, organized and chaired an all-day symposium on the Hill entitled *Parliamentary Diplomacy: The Emerging Role*

for Parliamentarians in Diplomacy, surely a demonstration of how widely accepted the concept now is.

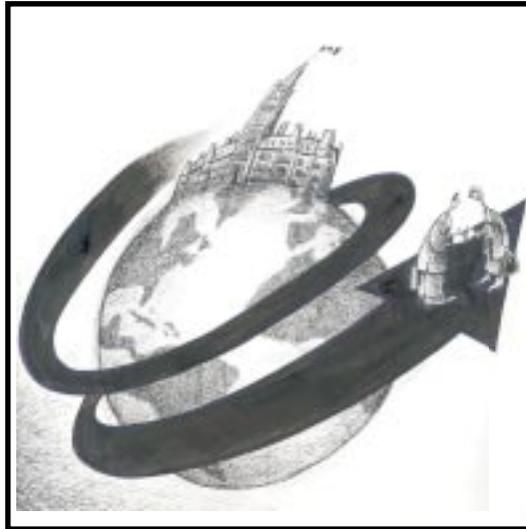
Unfortunately, despite the increased level of activity, relatively-few Canadian Members of Parliament gain the range and depth of opportunity to engage in parliamentary diplomacy that are enjoyed by parliamentarians in many other legislatures which regularly appoint delegates for the full term of their election, that is for four or five years. By contrast, the usual practice in Canada is to appoint members as delegates to a single inter-parliamentary meeting. A few Canadian members are selected for a second or even a third year, usually the chairs of the associations and those elected to office in an inter-parliamentary association. Some members of opposition parties have, with their whip's approval, also been regularly re-appointed to specific delegations, having demonstrated to their whip's satisfaction that participation in meetings of that association helps them in their critic function. In return they usually undertake not to seek appointment to any other inter-parliamentary delegations. However, delegates are not actually re-selected until the delegation is formed the next year. Not surprisingly, the uncertainty can constrain their involvement in planning for the following year's

activities. Only those fortunate members who are re-appointed for a number of years have the opportunity to become familiar with the issues and get to know parliamentarians from other countries – conditions that are necessary for effective engagement.

The extended appointments enjoyed by parliamentarians in many other countries enable them to set goals and to concentrate their attention, thereby creating what is in effect a parliamentary career path. Very few Canadian Members enjoy the same opportunity.

The extended appointments enjoyed by parliamentarians in many other countries enable them to...create what is in effect a parliamentary career path

This paper will first examine how opportunities for parliamentary diplomacy have evolved and review some of the limitations of current practice in Canada. We shall conclude by suggesting how changing certain practices could increase the opportunities open to Canadian Members, make possible a more effective contribution by them and give them greater career satisfaction.



THE GROWTH OF INTERPARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITIES

Toward the end of the nineteenth century the combined impact of the growing role of parliaments in governmental processes in Europe and the development of easy travel by railways led to the formation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 1889, the granddaddy of inter-parliamentary bodies. Canada joined in 1900. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association – initially known as the Empire Parliamentary Association – was the next to be established in 1911, responding to the formation of self-governments in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa around the turn of the century and to the development of speedier steamships that made it easier for MPs from the far-flung old Commonwealth to come together.

The big expansion in inter-parliamentary activity occurred after the Second World War. For Canada the process began with the establishment of the NATO Parliamentarians in 1955 and the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group in 1959. At the interparliamentary level the *Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie* was set up in 1967, the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association (which organizes annual meetings with delegations from the European Parliament and the Council of Europe) in

1980 and the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas in 2001. At the bilateral level, in addition to the link with the US Congress, associations were established with the *Assemblée nationale* of France in 1965, the Japanese Diet in 1985, the United Kingdom Parliament in 1998 and the Chinese National Peoples Congress, also in 1998.

The authority and autonomy of these multilateral bodies varies greatly. The European Parliament is in a class by itself: its members are directly elected and it exercises some budgetary and legislative powers vis-à-vis the European Union's executive, the powerful ministerial Commission. Next in terms of its formal standing is the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, which was formed at the end of the Second War as a symbol of Europe's desire to end conflict on the continent. It meets monthly and monitors the work of the Committee of Ministers and of the Ministers' Deputies. The members of the Assembly are appointed by member legislatures. The Council's Court of Human Rights for Europe has become the instrument for establishing pan-European human rights standards. However, the steady growth in the role and power of the European Union in other domains has circumscribed the authority of the

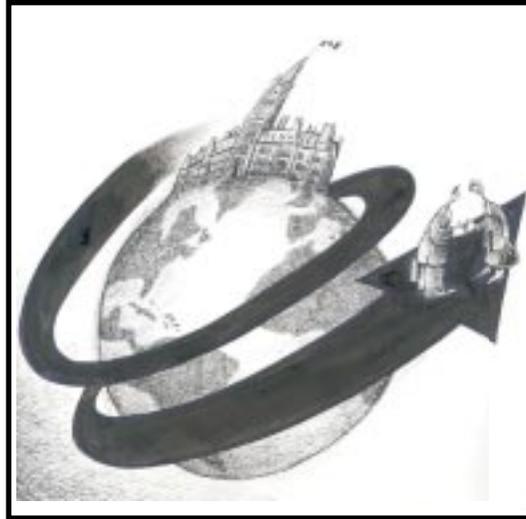
Council of Europe. Although Canada is not a member of the European Union or the Council of Europe, Canadian Members meet with a delegation from the European Parliament each year and a parliamentary delegation is invited annually to participate in a session of the Consultative Assembly, where Canada enjoys observer status.

The standing and the influence exercised by the inter-parliamentary bodies of which Canada is a full member vary considerably. While none of them have achieved formal consultative status with the intergovernmental organization to which they relate, namely NATO, the OSCE, the OAS, the Arctic Council, the Commonwealth, *la francophonie* and the United Nations, they have all succeeded sooner or later in establishing effective working relationships with them. Those parliamentarians fortunate enough to participate in one of these inter-parliamentary bodies for several years become well informed on the subjects that the intergovernmental body deals with. Over time, having developed good working relations with parliamentarians from other participating countries, they are able to collaborate in formulating recommendations for changes in policy or practice. With the experience gained they are also in a position to contribute to policy discussion in Parliament, in committees and in caucus.

Two other inter-parliamentary bodies deserve brief mention. Canadian members of Parliamentarians for Global Action, a successor of the World Federalists,

participate in some international meetings. However, in its operations it is closer to a friendship group. The whips exercise no control over participation and it receives no funding from Parliament. Consequently Canadian members are called upon to fund their own participation. The Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (generally known as GOPAC) founded only in 2002 differs in one major respect from other inter-parliamentary bodies, in that parliamentarians join as individuals rather than through their legislatures.

As intergovernmental organizations have come to perceive that knowledgeable legislators can become supporters and advocates with their home parliaments, their attitude to relations with parliamentarians from constituent countries has slowly become more welcoming. Indeed, this was the argument that led the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs when the United Nations was first formed to arrange for visits each autumn by Members of Parliament to the General Assembly, a practice that continues to this day. However, the time that Members of Parliament now spend at the UN is too short for them to develop much understanding of UN issues. Although the OECD still lacks a parliamentary dimension (though Canadian delegations to the European Parliament frequently arrange for a couple of days of briefings at OECD headquarters), that it is considering the establishment of a parliamentary assembly for the Organization is surely evidence of how the landscape is changing.



THE SITUATION IN CANADA

a) INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATIONS

In his introduction to the April, 2002 symposium on the Hill on parliamentary diplomacy, Dr. Bernard Patry, MP, the chair of the Canadian Branch of the *Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie* and chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade noted that the symposium was a first in Canada. He stated that its goal was to discuss the arguments for and against the new parliamentary diplomacy and where appropriate to “make recommendations to the Canadian government”. Following presentations on one or other of three themes by speakers whose experience was in the executive branch or agencies of government, there were opportunities for members to exchange views with the speakers on that theme. The Honourable Bill Graham, Minister of Foreign Affairs, spoke at lunch.

The speakers drew attention generally to the opportunities and the value to be derived from the involvement of members in inter-parliamentary activities. However, Huguette Labelle cautioned that to be effective “sustained twinning of Canadian Parliamentarians with their colleagues from other countries” was necessary, adding that it is not enough

to “get together only once a year”. In response to this observation several Members of Parliament pointed out that to achieve effective twinning and on-going contact most inter-parliamentary associations would need greater financial resources. For her part Maureen O’Neil stressed that “it is necessary to identify those individuals who are really interested in the issue”. Otherwise she warned that the opportunity amounted only to a pleasant trip for a member to a meeting with parliamentarians abroad – a practice pejoratively described as ‘parliamentary tourism’. In other words continuity was important.

Apart from pointing out that the modest financial resources of some Canadian associations limit their participation in the full range of inter-parliamentary association activities, there was no discussion during the day’s exchange of another problem – the limited continuity in the membership of delegations year over year. It is notable that not only are delegations from many other legislatures more generously funded, but many are also appointed to inter-parliamentary association delegations for the life of the legislature. As a result delegates from these legislatures have four or five years to learn about the issues being dealt with by the association as well as the opportunity to develop close personal working relations with

delegates from other member countries and to participate with knowledge in the elaboration of recommendations for change. As a consequence their participation becomes a useful and personally satisfying focus of their work as parliamentarians.

In Canada membership in each of the inter-parliamentary associations is open to any MP or Senator on payment of \$20.00 annually for each group. A couple of months prior to meetings, a notice is circulated by the executive secretary to all paid-up members giving the date and place and inviting applications. The number of places available to each party is proportional to the seats that they hold in each of the two Houses. At a specified date the list by party of all applicants is submitted to the chair of the executive, and at the same time is referred to the whips of all parties in both Houses. While the association executive is responsible for its administration, the whips have the final say on who forms the delegation.

Some interesting efforts to achieve greater continuity are worth noting. Whips are invited to attend the meeting of the executive of the Canada-US Inter-parliamentary Group to discuss appointments with them, it being recognized that maintaining good relations through continuity with the US Members of Congress is very important. The chair of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association, a senior MP, has also insisted on making recommendations regarding appointments to the government whip.

When making their selection the whips listen to recommendations made by the member of their party on the association executive. But they are also under pressure from other members of their caucus who consider that their past cooperation deserves occasional rewards.

As a result it is not uncommon for members to be appointed to an association with which they have had no previous contact. Their lack of knowledge of the procedures of the institution, of the subjects under discussion and of delegates from other countries combine to limit their effectiveness and their capacity to promote Canadian interests and viewpoints. Likewise since they have no assurance of participating in future meetings, there is little inducement for them to keep informed on the subjects that were discussed that will come up again

the next year. Indeed, the process of selection is sufficiently unpredictable that some members consider the membership fees in these associations as a kind of lottery ticket to win a pleasant trip, a trip rendered more attractive by the fact that spouses or partners are welcome on most delegations (at the expense of the member).

Of the 150 MPs who responded in 2002 to the inquiry from the International and Inter-parliamentary Exchanges Directorate and asked to join (and paid up) one or more inter-parliamentary or bilateral association, 14 percent opted to join all of the eleven associations funded by Parliament, 50 percent joined five or more of the associations. In addition 23 percent paid to join all three of the recognized friendship groups. Only 27 percent of those who joined one or more of the inter-parliamentary or bilateral associations decided not to join any of the three friendship groups. By contrast, taken together, 28 percent of Senators and MPs joined the Canada-Israel Friendship Group. Although fewer Senators asked to join all associations, 48 percent paid to join five or more of them.

The current practice which involves considerable rotation on delegations has its defenders. They see merit in spreading the experience among the largest number of members, arguing that even participation in a single inter-parliamentary meeting has an educational impact. This is one of the few opportunities for a form of professional development available to parliamentarians and can be particularly enlightening for members with little or no experience of foreign travel and parliamentary diplomacy. They also maintain that the opportunity to participate in an expense-paid trip abroad should be shared as widely as possible among members. The consequence, however, is that Canada's role in these associations is less effective and influential than it could be.

The pattern of appointments to inter-parliamentary and bilateral associations that emerges from a comparison of the membership of delegations over the years is quite confusing. Some of the associations have included a clause in their constitution calling for 60 percent of their number being reappointed so as to ensure a measure of continuity. However, appointments are made by up to five whips from the House (if there is room on the delegation for

representatives of all five parties in the Commons) and two from the Senate, each of whom acts independently. Smaller parties with only one place either reappoint a member who participated previously or someone new, achieving either 100 or 0 percent reappointment. At times a whip may be prepared to reappoint a member, only to find that he or she has another commitment at that time. As a result the number of delegates reappointed from year to year fluctuates substantially. Strangely enough, some members appear on successive years on different delegations.

In the circumstances an effective way to enhance the experience and hence the quality of Canadian delegations to parliamentary associations would be to limit the number of associations that a member would or could join, either by increasing the membership fee to the point where only a genuinely interested member would join or through a decision of the JIC to establish a limit. Either of these approaches would require members to make a choice. A second and even more effective step would be for whips of the larger parties to appoint a few members to important associations for the life of the Parliament.

In the circumstances an effective way to enhance the experience and hence the quality of Canadian delegations...would be to limit the number of associations that a member could join

b) BILATERAL ASSOCIATIONS

The situation of the bilateral associations is rather similar. The principal difference from the inter-parliamentary associations is that organizational arrangements are made on alternate years by the host country, so that there is no need for an often costly international secretariat, which naturally reduces the cost of participation. However, other than the annual meeting, there are rarely special events at other times of the year, which means that it is more difficult to develop an ongoing working relationship with parliamentarians in the partner country.

Apart from the five countries with which Canada has established bilateral associations – the United States, Great Britain, France, Japan and China – visits have

been exchanged with the Mexican Assembly since 1975. The status of this exchange is unique. There is no formal association. Instead visits are organized and authorized by the Speakers. In addition the Speakers of both Houses normally lead two or three delegations a year for working visits to the legislatures of other countries. In almost every instance Senators or MPs are invited to form part of the delegation of the appropriate Speaker. On occasion a Speaker will lead a joint delegation composed of Senators and MPs. Normally these visits are reciprocated.

Among all inter-parliamentary and bilateral associations, it is undeniable that the Canada-US Inter-parliamentary Group is the association that holds the greatest potential for promoting Canadian interests. First the United States, the world's most powerful country, is Canada's neighbour, its main trading partner by a huge margin and a country with a significant cultural influence. Secondly, the US Congress has more autonomous power than any other legislature in the world, with a capacity to mandate action by the US executive branch that can have serious consequences for Canada. There is, in sum, simply no other bilateral relationship that has close to the same degree of significance for Canada. Accordingly contact by Canadian members with Members of Congress has unique potential payoff.

Historically it is possible to point to a few occasions where the Canada-US Inter-parliamentary Group has been responsible for developments from which Canada benefited significantly. Negotiations over the Free Trade Agreement came to a sudden halt in 1987 when efforts to reach agreement on a dispute settlement mechanism failed and the Canadian negotiators walked away. In despair Secretary Baker turned to Sam Gibbons, a senior member of the House Ways and Means Committee and a regular participant in the annual meetings of the Canada-US Inter-parliamentary Group, and asked him for help. Based on his experience in the Group Gibbons suggested the formula that was subsequently enshrined in the Agreement and which, while not perfect, has been generally helpful. Prior to this event, in the early 1980's when negotiations on extending the West Coast Salmon Treaty were faltering badly, under the auspices of the Group a small delegation went to Washington and met all day with the Senators from Alaska and Washington State, the

two states with the greatest interest in the future arrangements. Out of these meetings came agreement to resume negotiations under a new formula that produced another five years of agreement. While not ideal, it preserved peace for a period. Neither of these successful outcomes would have been possible without the past experience and contacts established through the Inter-parliamentary Group.

The friendly relationship established with the US Senators and Congressmen makes it possible to gain access to them on special occasions. In 2001 when the softwood lumber dispute surfaced with new vigour, the Canadian group decided to arrange short visits to Washington for the purpose of arranging one-on-one meetings with members of both Houses. Through this means meetings were arranged with some 60 Members of Congress, in which Canadian concerns on this and related subjects were conveyed. While undoubtedly the meetings made Canadian concerns better understood in Congress, the problem itself remained unresolved.

But there are unfortunately situations that limit the Group's effectiveness. Although substantive discussion takes place once a year for a day and a half, the agenda is usually too large, the product of a practice that allows members of both delegations to suggest additional topics for discussion, which often means that there may be insufficient time to discuss those subjects of particular importance to both countries. In addition delegations on both sides are selected with little regard for the priority subjects for debate. As a result the US side may lack senior members of the responsible Congressional committees on the key topics under discussion. In addition, inevitably events arise from time to time on the US side that limit attendance, a problem that the Canadian delegation has only faced once in 1971.

To get around these limitations, some experiments have been undertaken with modest results. In the early 1980's when the United States steel industry first began pressing for restrictions on imports of Canadian steel, the Ministry of Industry funded a two day visit to Washington of four MPs from all three parties led by Jim Peterson to meet and make the case with concerned American Members of Congress. A few years later the Centre for Legislative Exchange arranged for a meeting in Toronto of members of the US Congressional steel caucus where

they were exposed to Canadian Members representing constituencies with steel producers, the then Minister of Industry, the Hon. James Kelleher, senior officials and heads of Canadian steel companies. Through these exchanges it became apparent to this key group of Members of Congress that there was a vital two way trade in truck load quantities of specialized steels that was important in both countries and quite different from the ship loads of steel being exported to the United States from low cost producers abroad. As a direct result the US steel caucus ceased to press for the application of anti-dumping duties against Canadian steel.

Another outcome was a decision in Parliament to establish a Canadian steel caucus, which continues to enjoy good working relations with the US steel caucus. Symptomatic of the special relationship the current president of the Canadian steel caucus, Tony Valeri, was the only foreigner invited to testify before the US International Trade Commission in extensive hearings on the whole range of steel imports into the United States. What appears to make this exchange effective is that it is dealing with a bilateral relationship where each side has an interest in collaboration.

c) OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

Travel by parliamentary committees to other countries when engaged in an inquiry offers yet another opportunity for Members to learn from the experience of other countries. In practice the Committees on Foreign Affairs and International Trade and on National Defence have the main opportunity to travel abroad. The former committee has recently completed a comprehensive report entitled *Partners in North America: Advancing Canada's Relations with the United States and Mexico*. To prepare for its review, it held meetings in the United States and in Mexico. Its report advocated improved parliamentary cooperation with both countries. One of the American witnesses asserted how important it was to establish "bridges and links...with members of the House of Representatives and the Senate." This observation reaffirms the importance of finding suitable occasions where members can represent Canadian concerns with US Members of Congress, something that is not easy because US legislators are now so busy.

Other opportunities for travel at public expense occur when the Prime Minister and Ministers invite

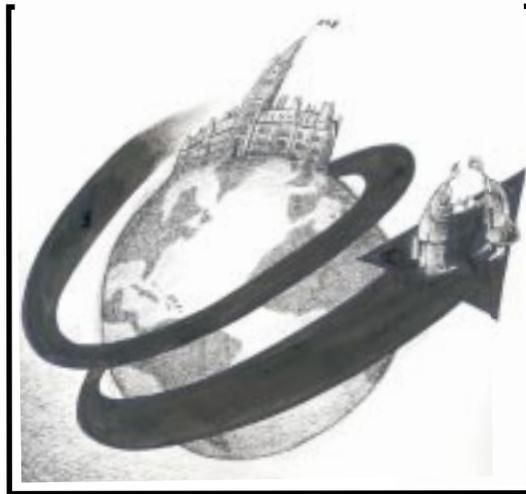
members to accompany them, which they occasionally do. However, these trips are one-time events that rarely lead to follow-on relationships for the participating members and any diplomatic activity is usually undertaken exclusively by the Prime Minister or the Minister. Similarly the Speakers of both Houses, when they make courtesy visits to foreign countries, invite a few members to accompany them. While it is true that Speakers are to some degree precluded by their office from engaging in advocacy on policy issues, these trips can be interesting and informative for members because they participate in all activities.

Apart from the several interparliamentary and bilateral associations, there are a number of what are often referred to as friendship groups. They operate on quite different principles. They are self-selecting bodies formed by Members who have a personal interest in a particular country (e.g. the Canada-Russia Parliamentary Group) or who stem from the partner country (e.g. the Canada-Ireland Friendship Group) or have a number of constituents from that country (e.g. the Canada-Cyprus Friendship Group). There are three official groups (with Germany, Italy and Israel). Although they receive no funds from Parliament, the International and Inter-parliamentary Affairs Directorate includes the three groups in the notice they circulate asking Senators and MPs which associations they wish to join and

collects \$10 from each member who asks to join. In addition there are some 30 unofficial groups. The House maintains a record based on reports from Senators and MPs who have travelled abroad for one of these groups or who have received visits in Canada from the partner group. As a result the list is an estimate only. (The known unofficial groups are listed in Annex B)

The range of activities of friendship groups depends on their financial resources. Since they are not funded by Parliament they manage their own affairs and the whips do not determine who participates, other than approving a member's absence from Ottawa when the House is in session. In practice group members will usually turn out for meetings when important visitors from the partner country come to Canada. If major physical disasters occur in the partner country, friendship group members will also normally take a lead in appealing for help.

With minimal resources friendship groups are rarely in a position to arrange for visits by their members to the partner country. The major exception occurs when the partner government or legislature funds visits in order to gain understanding of their situation and support from Canadian members. Both Israel and Taiwan do this on a regular basis. While apartheid was in force visits to South Africa by members were also regularly organized by that government.



INNOVATIVE WAYS TO INVOLVE MEMBERS IN PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY

In 1973 when Canada was faced with a decision as to whether to remain in Vietnam as part of the newly established International Commission for Control and Supervision, the then Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Hon. Mitchell Sharp, decided to visit that country himself to examine the situation on the ground before making a decision. In what is possibly a unique approach, he invited the leaders of the three opposition parties to designate a representative to accompany him so as to ensure that the issue would be “dealt with on a non-partisan basis”, an invitation that the NDP and Social Credit accepted but which the Progressive Conservatives rejected. Sharp included the MPs in all meetings, shared his briefing books with them and they jointly discussed the recommendation that he would make to the government on their return, namely that Canada should agree to participate for another 60 days to give the other members of the Commission a last opportunity to demonstrate that they could work together. As a result of the involvement of members of the opposition in the inquiry, the Secretary of State’s recommendation was supported on all sides of the House, so much so that the foreign affairs critic of the Conservative party and potential new

leader, Claude Wagner, lost credibility with his party colleagues because of his refusal to join the mission to Vietnam. This arrangement might profitably be adopted again on suitable occasions in future.

In what is possibly a unique approach, Mitchell Sharp invited the leaders of the three opposition parties to designate a representative to accompany him so as to ensure that the issue would be “dealt with on a non-partisan basis”

Recently another opportunity to involve an MP in substantive parliamentary diplomacy occurred when David Pratt was sent to Sierra Leone to study and report on the deadly civil conflict that had broken out in that country. As a municipal councillor he had three times visited that country previously. As a result he became known to the Sierra Leone community in Canada. When civil war broke out in that country he was approached by community members and asked to help. He was able to arrange a meeting with the then minister, the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, who responded by asking him to

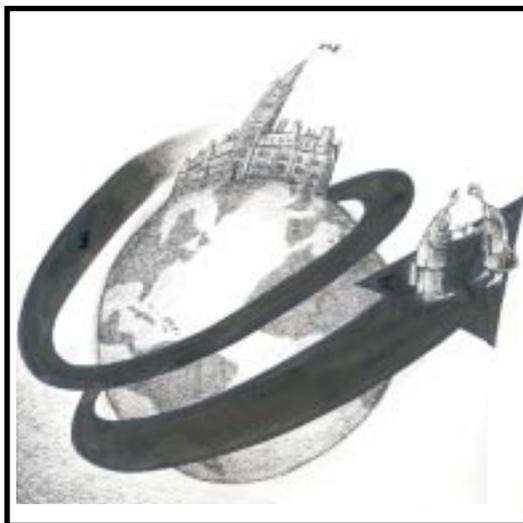
serve as his personal representative and to prepare a report for him. His report entitled *Forgotten Crisis* because it coincided with the NATO military action in Kosovo which captured all the media's attention, was published. Although it had some impact, Pratt felt that the situation remained serious, aggravated by the growing trade by the rebels in diamonds. This led him in 2001 to suggest to the new minister, the Honourable John Manley, that he be sent on a second mission, which he was. His second report, *Danger and Opportunity in a Regional Conflict* was also published. After his first mission Pratt was invited to report to the Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, but not after the second.

Based on the experience of Mitchell Sharp in 1973, it is worth wondering whether Pratt's mission might have been more productive had he been accompanied by a suitable opposition member. Pratt himself recognized the possible benefit but reported that security had been tight and that a second person on the mission might have complicated the situation.

Two other comparable missions are worth noting, both involving Sudan. Former Senator Lois Wilson

was asked by Lloyd Axworthy if she would serve as his personal envoy to study the situation in that country. She made two visits to Sudan as well as visiting several neighbouring countries collecting information and reporting orally to Axworthy. However since her appointment coincided with the assignment of John Harker to examine the Talisman investment in Sudanese oilfields she faced suspicion as to her objectives. Senator Wilson resigned in 2002 and some months later Senator Mobina Jaffer was named as Bill Graham's special envoy on Sudan, an interesting appointment in view of the fact that she grew up in Uganda, a country that borders Sudan in the south.

Senator Wilson was also asked by Axworthy to head a mission to North Korea to assess the situation in that country and to advise on the whether Canada should seek to establish diplomatic relations. An MP, Eileen Carroll, was included in the delegation which was extremely well received in North Korea. Based on their report successful negotiations to open relations were completed by departmental officials.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although a substantial number of Canadian Members of Parliament have had an opportunity to participate in a modest way in the growing field of parliamentary diplomacy, the contribution that individual members have been able to make and the satisfaction that they have derived from their involvement has varied greatly. A number of changes in practice outlined below could strengthen the role of participating Members and offer them the possibility of making a more useful contribution. Indeed, such changes could provide some members of all parties a satisfying career path where they could look forward to pursuing longer term goals in an area of interest to them.

A number of changes in the practice of the Canadian Parliament relating to inter-parliamentary associations that would contribute to this result are noted below:

1. Appoint some members who have demonstrated knowledge and interest in the issues that are discussed and dealt with in a specific inter-parliamentary association as delegates for the life of the Parliament.
2. Endorse and promote a practice introduced this past year by the Parliamentary Assembly of the

OSCE that calls on member legislatures to report to the international secretariat on actions taken and results achieved by each delegation since the last annual meeting in pressing for the adoption by their government or parliament of proposals endorsed by the Assembly at its previous meeting. If this practice were adopted by all inter-parliamentary associations it should lead participating parliamentarians to reflect more carefully on the language in resolutions calling for action.

Appoint some members...for the life of the Parliament.

3. Provide sufficient financial resources to individual associations to ensure that Canadian delegates are able to participate in the full range of activities undertaken by the organization. This is important, because as Huguette Labelle stated, "getting together only once a year" precludes effective twinning with parliamentarians from other countries. A special problem deserves attention. Since the fees of the international secretariats of those

associations with multiple member legislatures are usually designated in US dollars or Euros, the disposable funds of the Canadian member association can be quite seriously affected by a decline in the exchange rate of the Canadian dollar. To avoid a situation where the revenue available to the delegation would be reduced through no action of their own if the value of the Canadian dollar fell and to remove an irritant, the JIC might consider approving a budget for the activities of interparliamentary associations, and pay separately and directly for membership in the international associations.

the JIC might...pay separately and directly for membership in the international associations.

4. Limit membership, directly or indirectly, in one or at most two associations, perhaps one inter-parliamentary and one bilateral association. This would remove the element of a lottery where members register for a number of associations to maximize the change of appointment and a trip. This should give members an incentive to become knowledgeable about the issues dealt with by the association that they join and an opportunity to become acquainted with delegates from other legislatures, making it

possible for them to promote Canadian interests and raise Canadian concerns.

In addition to taking steps to render participation in inter-parliamentary association activities more effective, there are a couple of practices that could provide new, rewarding and productive ways of expanding the opportunity for private members to engage in parliamentary diplomacy. The recent practice of appointing individual members who have particular knowledge and aptitude to undertake missions of inquiry on international issues should be continued.

It would also be useful to explore the merits of including members on occasional missions abroad of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs or of International Trade or of junior ministers with regional responsibilities where there would be a prospect of developing all-party understanding of an international situation faced by Canada. If this practice were to be explored, the participating members should be included in business sessions and asked to participate in the evaluation of the impressions formed, as Mitchell Sharp did in 1973 in Vietnam. Naturally this approach would only be suitable in rather special situations.

Canada should benefit from more effective participation by Canadian members in parliamentary diplomacy. Representing the Canadian Parliament over a number of years on an inter-parliamentary delegation should also offer such members a personally satisfying parliamentary career path.

ANNEX A

Inter-parliamentary Associations

BILATERAL ASSOCIATIONS

Canada-United States Inter-parliamentary Group: founded 1959

Canada-France Parliamentary Association: founded 1965

Canada-Japan Parliamentary Group

Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum is housed under the Group

Canada-UK Parliamentary Association: founded 1998

Canada-China Legislative Association: founded 1998

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATIONS

Inter-Parliamentary Union

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

Canada-NATO Parliamentary Association

Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie

Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association

Formed in 1980 it groups the following relationships

- meetings with a delegation from the European Parliament
- meetings with a delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.
- meetings on the activities of the OECD

It also serves as an umbrella for participation in:

- The Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.
- Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region

Inter-parliamentary Forum of the Americas

ANNEX B

FRIENDSHIP GROUPS

Canada Africa Parliamentary Group
Canada-Algeria Friendship Group
Canada-Argentina Friendship Group
Canada-Armenia Friendship Group
Canada-Baltic States Friendship Group
Canada-Belgium Interparliamentary Group
Canada-Brazil Interparliamentary Group
Canada-Chile Friendship Group
Canada-Croatia/Bosnia-Herzegovina Friendship Group
Canada-Cyprus Friendship Group
Canadian Parliamentarians for Global Action
Canada-Greece Friendship Group
Canada Hong-Kong Friendship Group
Canada-Hungary Friendship Group
Canada-Ireland Friendship Group
Canada-Korea Friendship Group
Canada-Lebanon Friendship Group
Canada-Malta Friendship Group
Canada-Mexico Friendship Group
Canada-Morocco Parliamentary Group
Canada-Poland Friendship Group
Canada-Portugal Friendship Group
Canada-Romania Inter-Parliamentary Group
Canada-Russia Parliamentary Groupsie
Canada-Slovenian Parliamentary Group
Canada-Syria Parliamentary Group
Canada-Taiwan Friendship Group
Canada-Ukraine Friendship Group
Friendship Group of Parliamentarians for UNESCO