

PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS SECRETARIAT

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Fifteen years ago - practically to the day - the Parliamentary Relations Secretariat was created in the Parliament of Canada. It was not called that at the time. The office consisted of a desk and chair in a corner of the Speaker's Chambers in the House of Commons, occupied by an official just recently recruited from the Civil Service and called "Co-ordinating Secretary for Parliamentary Associations".

Until 1964 all of the staff-work involved in organizing Canadian involvement in the - then - only four Parliamentary Associations (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Inter-Parliamentary Union, North Atlantic Assembly and the Canada-United States bilateral Parliamentary Association) was done by the Clerks-at-the-Table. The

problem necessitating the new appointment was simply that the business of the House of Commons had increased to such an extent that none of the Table Officers could spend any time on business not directly related to what was going on in Parliament and its Committees.

Parliamentarians had very little official opportunity to travel abroad then. The budget was small, sufficient only to cover the cost of twelve outgoing delegations a year. Even then, most of the delegations consisted of two or three parliamentarians travelling to the international conferences of one of the four official Parliamentary Associations - a far cry from the annual parliamentary exchange of some one hundred delegations that comprise our 1979 official program.

The mid-sixties were years in which parliamentarians from many countries began to seek first-hand knowledge and experience in international affairs through increased travel, person-to-person contact and exchange of views with their counterparts in the parliaments of other countries. Canadian participation in the existing Parliamentary Associations was on the upswing and in 1965 the Canadian Parliament played host to the largest parliamentary conference ever held in Ottawa - the 54th Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union which brought over 700 participants here for a ten-day program. A year later, in September 1966, the three-week-long 12th Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was held in Canada, with cross-country pre-conference tours organized in such a way as to get at least some of the delegates into each one of the provinces for programs organized by the Legislatures. In the same year a new parliamentary association was created, a bilateral link with the French National Assembly which provided for annual bilateral conferences to be held alternately in each of the two countries. In the following year, 1967, another new association, the International Association of French-Speaking Parliamentarians was set up, providing for annual conferences of francophone parliamentarians in the various French-speaking countries of the world. That association, which is also known as the AIPLF, held its 1971 Annual Conference in Canada and will most likely be meeting here in the early 1980's. In 1979, Canada was host to the 23rd Annual Conference of the CPA, again with a tour program that involved each of the ten Provinces and their Legislatures.

In the years since the sixties the program of parliamentary exchanges has grown substantially. Each of the Parliamentary Associations has increased its activities, and the Parliamentary Relations Secretariat has grown to a full-time organization comprised of

nineteen staff members, some directly responsible for the various associations and groups, others working in administrative, financial and logistical areas of organization. But, really, it is particularly in the area of reciprocal exchanges with other parliaments in the world that much of the increase has taken place. Invitations began to come in from other parliaments for Canadian parliamentary delegations to make official visits to other countries for the purpose of discussing increased trade, technical assistance and other bilateral or multilateral interests, and the Canadian Parliament, in turn, issued invitations for return visits by parliamentary delegations from those countries. Since 1965 our program of parliamentary exchanges has included exchanges with several countries of Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Latin America, the Pacific and Eastern Asia area, as well as South Asia, all in addition to the delegations that participate each year in the various activities of the parliamentary associations.

And there are many other services our Secretariat provides in the parliamentary relations field. For instance, on numerous occasions throughout the year, individual foreign Parliamentarians come to Ottawa with requests for assistance to meet various parliamentary and departmental officials; these visits necessitate the setting up of programs involving special meetings, briefings and visits.

There is no doubt that our organization has vastly increased its volume of participation over the last decade or so. And there is equally no doubt that our Secretariat can look forward to increase its output in the years to come, as it is certain that it will be called upon to assist in fulfilling other future parliamentary commitments.