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# MPs find people favor tough role in foreign affairs

By Jack Cahill Toronto Star

Canadians want the government to adopt a more independent and aggressive stance in foreign affairs and would like to see a return of the "honest broker" role the nation played in the era of Prime Minister Lester Pearson.

That is the consensus of a majority of politicians on a special joint committee on Canada's international relations, which has travelled the country hearing submissions from the public since January.

The senators and MPs, who started three days of hearings in Toronto yesterday, said other subjects high in the minds of Canadians include human rights, increased but more efficient foreign aid, Arctic sovereignty, the problems of Central America, and more effective trade — though not necessarily free trade with the United States.

They said there has been a powerful shift in public opinion away from trade with Europe towards increased trade with the Pacific Rim countries, and to a lesser extent Caribbean and Latin American nations.

### 'Quite strong'

"There's a mood out there among Canadians that has been saying to us, 'Look, we want to have our own foreign policy.'"

liance would act as a counterweight to the superpowers and reduce Canada's dependence on the U.S.

Most committee members appeared to agree, however, that the confidence of Canadians in the United Nations as an effective vehicle for a world federal order has declined.

One recommendation that appeared to startle the MPs yesterday was a proposal put forth by the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America, which represents most major Canadian churches.

### 'Real change'

The inter-church group urged that Canada require fundamental structural changes in oppressive and unjust societies as part of an over-all foreign policy goal of promoting human rights.

The group also said Canada should "establish links with and, where appropriate, assist popular movements and new governments committed to real change."

Directly differing attitudes on Middle East problems also emerged.

Janice Stein, a professor of political science at the University of Toronto, said Canada should give vigorous diplomatic and economic support to Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Palestinian leaders — notably the West Bank mayors — who are still

# Minister orders survey of food bank users

By Sandro Contenta Toronto Star

The Ontario government wants to find out whether people in subsidized housing are using food banks and other support agencies, because "there really isn't any good reason" why they should, Social Services Minister John Sweeney says.

Sweeney revealed yesterday that some Metro Toronto food banks and other agencies have been asked to conduct audits to find out what types of people use their services. The audits began this past winter.

"The difficulty we have with the claim that there are people even in subsidized housing using (food banks) is, quite frankly, there shouldn't be," Sweeney said.

People in subsidized housing are spending only 25 per cent of their income on rent and should have enough money left over for basic necessities such as food and clothing, he added.

The minister stressed, however, that he is not making a "judgment call" on such people, but is simply trying to find out whether the province's social assistance programs are adequate.

### Own audit

If the audits find that many people on welfare are using food banks, then the government will have to find out why, Sweeney said.

"Are they using the foodbanks because they want to use the money that they would otherwise spend on food for something else that's equally as worthwhile?" Sweeney asked.

"I mean, don't get me wrong here. I'm not saying they're spending money foolishly. My God, when you've only got \$500 or \$600, you can't spend it foolishly, no matter how you spend it."

The social services ministry has



Food bank probe: Social Services Minister John Sweeney, left, wants to find out more about food bank use. MPP Richard Johnston calls for higher social assistance payments.

also undertaken an audit of its own programs and that information should be analyzed by mid-summer, he said.

By the end of both the ministry and agency audits, Sweeney said he hopes to determine whether welfare rates are high enough and suggested that he may be willing to consider revamping the system.

At the moment, Ontario's social assistance programs are "designed to put food on the table and a roof over your head and clothes on your back and that's it," the minister said. "Now, that may not be enough."

Richard Johnston, the New Democrat social services critic, said people are forced to turn to food banks or to other support agencies such as soup kitchens and facilities that provide free clothing because social assistance payments are too low.

"The problem is that the amount of money people receive is so low

"If one of your kids has a birthday that week and you take him to McDonald's, then you probably end up blowing three nights worth of supper — that's how tight their budgets are," said MacDonald, whose organization co-ordinates the services of about 120 agencies or groups that distribute food in Metro.

### 41 agencies

A recent Star report on hunger in Metro found that 41 agencies provided groceries and food vouchers to an estimated 37,327 people in February.

As well, 161,099 free meals were served to hungry people that month.

The food banks and agencies conducting the audit requested by the government take part in the \$1.8 million Winter Emergency Shelter Program.

The program includes 34 agencies, including Stop 103, the Salvation Army and the United Church of Canada.

Johnston criticized Sweeney for stalling on reforms that should have gone ahead years ago and said the delays demonstrate that revamping the social welfare system is a low priority for the Liberal government.

# Our sagging dollar is a hot tourist draw

By Alfred Holden Toronto Star

Canada's sagging dollar may not be a source of national pride, but it is helping put this country and Ontario back on the world's tourist map. The number of foreign visi-

tors to Ontario jumped 13.6 per cent in January from a year earlier and 7.6 per cent in February to about 27,000 visitors both months.

Across Canada, the number of U.S. visitors totalled 3,218,000