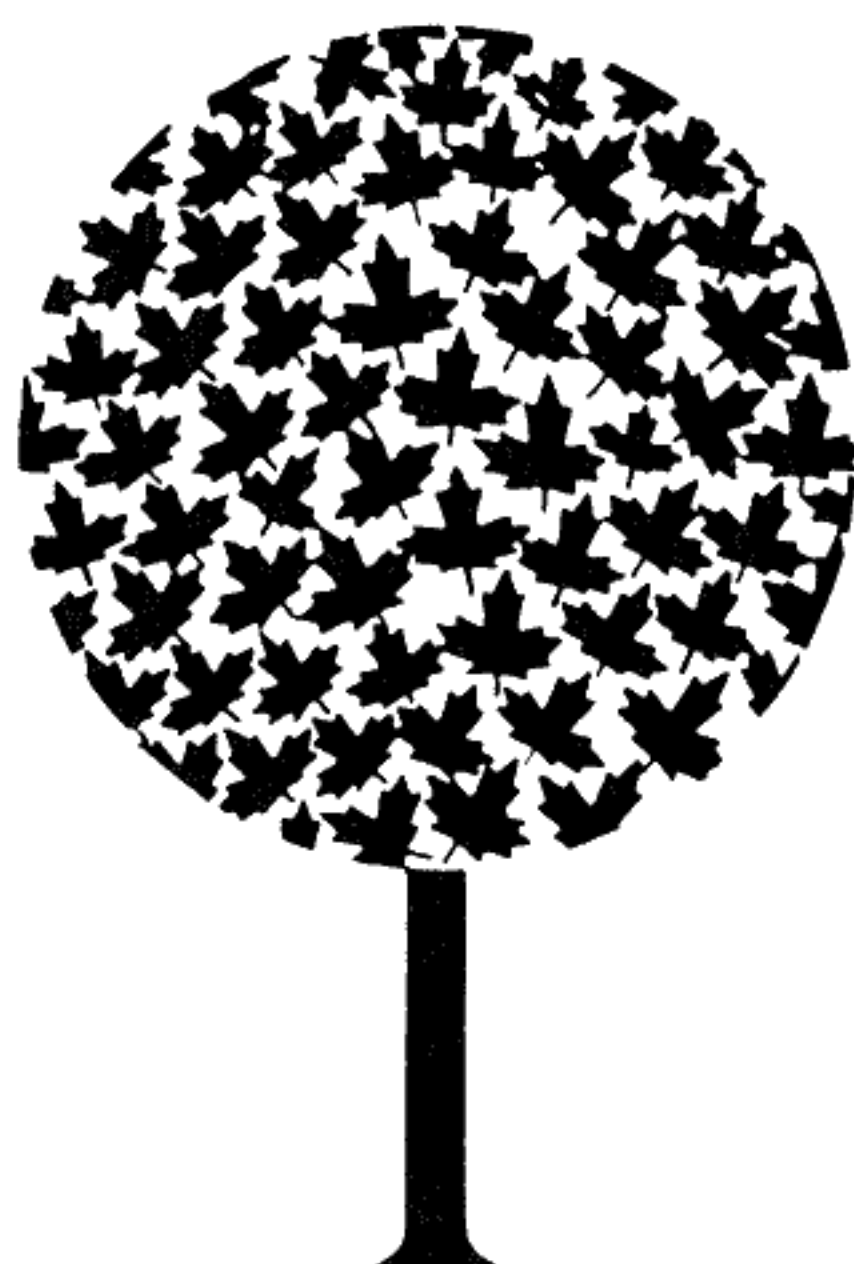


THE DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CANADIAN AUTONOMY, 1899 - 1939

F. H. Soward

THE CANADIAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



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THE DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CANADIAN AUTONOMY, 1899 - 1939

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THE DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CANADIAN AUTONOMY, 1899-1939

Canadians have become so accustomed to reading about the Prime Minister and the Minister of External Affairs becoming involved in diplomatic negotiations which may, as in 1971, involve them in journeys to Singapore, Tehran, Moscow, Brussels, Lisbon, Central Africa and the Middle East that they fail to realise how recent these demonstrations of an independent foreign policy actually are.

At the turn of the century it was still true in external affairs that, to use Mr. Glazebrook's phrase, the government pursued "Canadian aims through British means". There had been a Canadian High Commissioner in London for twenty years and an Agent General in Paris for almost as long, but neither of these officials had diplomatic status. Although Lord Carnarvon had noted as early as 1870 that "Our relations to Canada have been and are political rather than colonial", the Foreign Office vigilantly guarded the diplomatic unity of the British Empire. It saw to it that the channel of communications between Canada and the rest of the world flowed through London. In 1879, the Governor General was told that "The Dominion cannot negotiate independently with foreign powers and at the same time reap the benefit which she desires in negotiations from being part of the Empire". Such a detour could produce inconvenient delays. As Secretary of State Elihu Root (1905-1909) once said to a U.S. Senate Committee in explaining why it might take six months to get through each stage of negotiations with Canada:

"I would make some proposition to the British Ambassador here. He would send it to the Foreign Office in London, the Foreign Office would send it to the Colonial Office and the Colonial Office would send it to the government at Ottawa. [Root omitted to mention that the despatch would be addressed to the Governor General who would transmit it to the Privy Council, which in turn would designate what particular Minister should deal with it] . . . Finally Sir Wilfrid Laurier would find some time to pay attention to it."

It must be noted that this condition of "imperfectly developed sovereignty" did not preclude Canadian statesmen from stubbornly guarding their country's interests. They became especially adept at playing off the United States and the United Kingdom against each other in an endeavour to secure satisfactory terms on such practical questions as tariff rates and fishery rights. Sometimes their tactics thoroughly exasperated both London and Washington. In 1897, for example, Lord Salisbury, in a conversation with the United States

Ambassador, compared Canada to a "coquettish girl with two suitors". John Hay replied with more acerbity that "a closer analogy would be to call her a married flirt, ready to betray John Bull on any occasion but holding him responsible for all her follies"!

Two events early in the present century drew attention to the lack of autonomy in external affairs, and to the complications which could arise from that condition. They were the South African War and the Alaska Boundary Award. The former raised the question of Canada's involvement in British wars which did not imperil either her own safety or her economic well-being. Yielding to the emotional fervour of many in English-speaking Canada who were eager to rush to the aid of the Mother Country (who was not unwilling to have the rest of the world witness this display of imperial solidarity) Laurier authorized sending Canadian volunteers to South Africa. By so doing he probably averted a break-up of his administration, yet it cost him the support of a brilliant young M.P., Henri Bourassa, who was to become the spearhead of a new nationalist movement in Quebec. Although the Prime Minister successfully rode out the storm, when the House of Commons questioned his action in March, 1900, he was careful to claim "We simply provided the machinery and expenses for the two thousand young men who wanted to go and give their lives for the honour of their country and the flag they love." He also declared that Canada had the right to judge for herself whether or not she should take part in British wars. Sir Wilfrid made it clear that there was no question of what Canada would do in life or death struggles, but, with reference to what he described as "secondary wars" he declared that ". . . in future Canada shall be at liberty to act or not to act, to interfere or not to interfere, to do just as she pleases, and that she shall reserve to herself the right to judge whether or not there is cause for her to act". Laurier also claimed that in the South African crisis Canada had acted "in the full exercise of our sovereign power". Subsequently, he sharply criticized the school of thought "which wants to bring Canada into the vortex of militarism which is the curse and blight of Europe". This comment, made on the eve of the Colonial Conference of 1902, foreshadowed Laurier's rejection of the various proposals for greater imperial centralization which Joseph Chamberlain was to advocate.

The Alaska Boundary Award of 1903 was handed down by a judicial commission consisting of six "impartial jurists of repute" set up by the United States and Britain. The three American members, none of whom met the specification, were joined in their findings by the Lord Chief Justice of England and were opposed by the two Canadians on the tribunal. The award was closer to the intent of the treaty of 1825 which had defined the boundary than the Canadian claim, but the manner in which it had been secured and the dual

rôle of the unfortunate Lord Alverstone, apparently obliged to double as diplomat and judge, irritated Canadian opinion. As a British Columbia editor sarcastically noted. "Perhaps we should be thankful that there is no territory left which grasping Americans can receive and complaisant British commissioners can give away." Few stopped to think that Canada would have been no more successful if the negotiations had been entirely in her own hands. Laurier spoke for the majority when he deplored the fact that "we have not in our own hands the treaty-making power which would enable us to dispose of our own affairs". He suggested that the episode demonstrated the importance of asking the British Parliament for greater power ". . . so that if ever we have to deal with matters of a similar character again we shall deal with them in our own way, in our own fashion . . . according to the best light that we have". On this occasion it was significant that while it was Bourassa who favoured the presence of a Canadian representative in Washington it was a Manitoba Conservative, Sanford Evans, who advocated the creation of a Department of External Affairs. He had first suggested this in his book *The Canadian Contingents*, published during the recent war.

Although Laurier did not proceed to initiate the negotiations he had proposed, the memory of the Alaska Award left its mark upon Canadian policy in other ways. In Canadian-American relations it inspired the policy of short-circuiting British diplomacy by such devices as agreeing in 1909 to the establishment of an International Joint Commission to deal with disputes between the two countries over boundary waters and other matters. It probably contributed to the decision to secure reciprocity in 1911 by concurrent legislation rather than by a treaty, as had been done in 1854. Elsewhere its influence can also be seen in the manner of negotiating a trade treaty with France and a "gentleman's agreement" with Japan.

Since Confederation Canadians had acquired considerable experience in commercial negotiations but within carefully prescribed limits. When they showed signs in the early Nineties of being more assertive in such matters than was thought desirable in London, the Colonial Secretary, Lord Ripon, prepared a circular despatch in 1895 on commercial treaties.¹ He firmly rejected the proposal for giving the Colonies "the power of negotiating treaties for themselves without reference to Her Majesty's Government". Such negotiations, he insisted, must be conducted by the British representative at the capital of the country with which the colony wished to negotiate. The British diplomat could be assisted by a colonial delegate "either as a second plenipotentiary or in a subordinate capacity". If an

¹ cf. R. A. Shields, "Sir Charles Tupper and the Franco-American Treaty of 1895: A study of Imperial relations", *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. XLIX, no. 1, March, 1968.

agreement were concluded, it would require the approval of both the United Kingdom and the colony concerned, with the former, if necessary, overriding the wishes of the latter in its chosen rôle as guardian of "the common interests of the Empire". However, in 1907, when Sir Wilfrid Laurier informed the British government of Canada's desire to secure a new commercial treaty with France, the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, assented in a fashion which was a considerable departure from the Ripon formula. The British Ambassador in Paris was told that Sir Edward did not think it necessary "to adhere in the present case to the strict letter of this regulation". It would obviously be, he suggested, "more practical" for the negotiations to be left to "Sir Wilfrid Laurier and his Minister of Finance". "Doubtless", Sir Edward added, "they would keep the Ambassador informed of their progress". Once the agreement had been negotiated the Ambassador should sign jointly with the Canadian representatives, who would be given full powers for that purpose. Although sixteen years more were to pass before the signature of the British Ambassador was to be omitted from a treaty negotiated by Canadians, an important precedent had been established. It is no wonder that a few weeks later Sir Wilfrid proudly told the Canadian Manufacturers Association, "Without revolution, without any breaking of traditions, without any impairment of our allegiance, the time has come when Canadian interests are entrusted to Canadians." Referring to the French treaty, he remarked that it had been concluded "... with the whole assent of the British Crown and with the assent of the Foreign Office".

Less than three weeks after this speech, Sir Wilfrid informed the Colonial Office that the Government had decided to send to Tokyo the Minister of Labour, who was to discuss with the Japanese government and the British Ambassador measures for averting anti-Japanese riots such as had recently occurred in Vancouver. The telegram requested the despatch of credentials "... to show that the approval and support of the Crown are given to Mr. Lemieux's mission". The Colonial Office replied that there was no time to prepare a formal letter (only two weeks' notice had been given), but submitted a draft telegram to the British Ambassador in Tokyo for the same purpose which proved acceptable. Although the Canadian Government had not completely accepted the previous Japanese proposal for direct negotiations between the two countries, it appears that Lemieux was put fully in charge of the resulting satisfactory conversations. There was no suggestion from London of his acting in a secondary capacity. The firm, almost high-handed manner in which Ottawa had requested London's technical assistance was noteworthy. Sir Wilfrid was careful subsequently not to claim too much. He told the House of Commons that Lemieux's powers were difficult to define since "We have no diplomatic status any-

where . . .” Nevertheless the editor of the *Canadian Annual Review* was quite justified in his shrewd observation that “Canadian relations with foreign countries assumed a phase of very distinct and rather peculiar importance during 1907 . . .”

One of Ottawa’s most experienced civil servants, Joseph Pope, the Under-Secretary of State, accompanied Lemieux on his delicate mission to Tokyo. Sir John A. Macdonald’s former secretary, who had initiated Laurier into the manner of handling despatches transmitted to the Privy Council by the Governor General, had become convinced that it was time for a change in the manner of dealing with such communications. In this same fruitful year he submitted a memorandum to a Royal Commission studying the Civil Service in which he pointed to the need for a “more systematic mode” of handling external affairs.

Sir Joseph, as he later became, was interested in efficiency, a coherent and uniform plan, not in prestige or status. It distressed him to see no systematic policy pursued in the distribution or acknowledgement of despatches received by the Governor General, and to note delays in replies and inconsistencies in policy as a consequence. As a conscientious civil servant he was uneasy at the knowledge that no one department had a complete record of all correspondence from abroad. He was well aware that the Cabinet, or a committee of it, was not the most appropriate body for handling such material with efficiency. As he wrote later in an article on the Federal government in *Canada and Its Provinces*: “. . . the feeling grew that Cabinet councils were not after all, the place for the reading and distribution of lengthy despatches and that this had much better be done elsewhere.” With commendable brevity Pope added, “the result was the Department of External Affairs”.¹

This pithy comment concealed Pope’s major rôle in the affair. It was true that his memorandum to the Royal Commission, urging the creation of a department containing “a small staff of young men,

¹ An admirable account of the origins of the Department of External Affairs has been written by Professor James Eayrs in the volume by Hugh L. Keenleyside et al., *The Growth of Canadian Policies in External Affairs* (Durham, 1960), pp. 14-32. His paper demonstrates that Lemieux, the Governor General, Earl Grey, and Bryce, the British Ambassador in Washington, were Pope’s “allies” in securing the creation of what Pope called “a sort of Foreign Office”. Professor R. A. Coghlan has supplemented Eayrs’ essay by a paper read to the Canadian Historical Association in 1968 on “James Bryce and the Establishment of the Department of External Affairs” which points out that Bryce, as former colleague of Crewe (Colonial Office) and Grey (Foreign Office), could effectively argue the case of the Department as he did in the summer of 1908. He had previously convinced Laurier of its necessity for practical purposes.

well educated and carefully selected", to be carefully trained in the handling of diplomatic correspondence "by the few in the Civil Service who were conversant with these matters and who were growing old and would soon disappear", did not achieve its purpose. As he said disgustedly, the Commission "failed completely to grasp the point". But in September, 1908 Laurier told Pope he had decided to establish a department of External Affairs and make him its permanent head. In February, 1909 Pope was instructed to draft a bill for that purpose which his chief, Charles Murphy presented to the Commons on May 4, 1909.¹ His speech repeated almost verbatim the Pope arguments. Its opening sentence declared that the Bill did not involve any "serious constitutional change". At this point a staunch imperialist, George Foster, interjected "We are thankful for that!" The Prime Minister took the same line, quoting the Australian precedent of several years' standing as justifying such a department to deal with both imperial and foreign affairs. However, Laurier did add that "... the foreign affairs with which Canada has to deal are becoming of such moment as to necessitate special machinery ...". The creation of this new machinery did not imply any trespass upon the prerogatives of the Governor General. Sir Wilfrid thought it better that the latter should continue to receive all communications relating to foreign affairs. On the other hand, it was significant that the Act described the Secretary of State who was to head the Department as having the "conduct" of all official communications with any other country. Laurier ended suggestions from the Colonial Office and Governor General that the word "care" would be more appropriate, while repudiating the suspicion that the new legislation might be regarded as "an improper attempt to shelve the Governor General". However Laurier did not attach the new department to his portfolio as Pope recommended and Borden, the opposition leader advocated in the debate. In view of Laurier and Skelton's subsequent career it is ironical that when he wrote his life of Laurier, published in 1921 he devoted less than a dozen lines to his hero's part in setting up the Department of External Affairs.

On June 1, 1909, the new department came into existence with Pope, as promised, as its first Under-Secretary. He continued to report to Murphy whom Laurier authorised, without legal sanction to sign despatches as Secretary of State for External Affairs. Laurier saw to it in Pope's words that "All important subjects of negotiation were . . . laid by me before the Prime Minister, according to Sir Wilfrid's instructions". It could scarcely have had a more modest beginning. The total budget of \$13,350 was less than the salary of

¹ The pertinent extract from Pope's memorandum and the Act of May 1909, are the first two documents of *Documents on Canadian External Relations, 1909-1919*, (Ottawa, 1967).

the present Under-Secretary. On Pope's staff there were initially two chief clerks, a messenger, and two "type-writers".¹ After occupying during the summer temporary accommodation in the East Block and the House of Commons, the Department settled down in cramped quarters over a barbershop in the Trafalgar Building on Bank Street. Besides distributing despatches to other government departments and, when necessary, preparing answers based upon the information supplied by the department or departments concerned, External Affairs was called upon to issue passports and supervise consular offices in Canada. The little group settled down quietly and inconspicuously to work. They were kept busy copying the files of the Governor General's office as a background for their duties, acting as a centralizing agency for communications, and receiving material on trade agreements, fishery questions, boundary matters, the Imperial Conference of 1911, and so on. The Under-Secretary neither claimed nor desired a voice in helping to frame foreign policy.

Before Laurier resigned after his defeat in 1911 he told Pope he would recommend to Borden that the Prime Minister should be head of the department. Accordingly the Act of April, 1912 stipulated that "... the First Minister shall be the Secretary of State for External Affairs." This act had two important and probably unforeseen consequences. The fact that External Affairs was the Prime Minister's own department gave it a certain prestige and influence in official circles. No sensible civil servant will readily differ over administrative questions with the official of a department which can, if need be, appeal to the Prime Minister to uphold its position. Jurisdictional disputes between departments over the chairmanship of interdepartmental committees were often avoided or solved by the Prime Minister making the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs their chairman. In January 1914, for instance, Sir Joseph presided over a committee of eight Deputy Ministers "to concert measures for the drawing up of a general Defence Scheme or War Book". The very nature of the Prime Minister's multifarious duties tended to give his deputy more room for exercising authority and initiative than any other civil servant of comparable rank. An able man with ideas and initiative who had the confidence of his chief could readily acquire great power and influence. Such a man was the second incumbent in the office of Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, O. D. Skelton. His tenure of office between 1925 and 1941, when he died from overwork, led an experienced Ottawa correspondent to describe him in an obituary article as the deputy Prime Minister.

¹ One of the Chief Clerks, William H. Walker, acted as Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, though not receiving the title until 1919.

But such developments were scarcely perceptible before war came in 1914. It was true that the Department had been given jurisdiction over the Paris Agency in 1913 and over the International Joint Commission the following year. It moved to more dignified quarters in the East Block on October 5, 1914. But it still did not control the High Commissioner's Office in London and, of course, did not have a single Foreign Service Officer in its ranks, since Canada possessed no diplomatic status. Its staff had increased very slightly to only 14 of all ranks, including two messengers. The most important addition was Loring Christie as Legal Adviser in 1913, a young Nova Scotian of great ability who had been employed in the Department of Justice in Washington and had courage and convictions. It was he, not Sir Joseph, whom Sir Robert was to take to London and Paris to the various conferences during and after the First World War. He was to play an equally important rôle as adviser to Prime Minister Meighen on such matters as the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. When, like Skelton, he died in 1941, he was serving his country as Minister to the United States.¹

Ever since he assumed office Sir Robert had been brooding over the problem of securing for Canada some voice in the formulation of British foreign policy. In return, he was prepared to have Canada assume a greater responsibility in such matters as defence. The First World War gave him his opportunity, which he utilized with skill and pertinacity. Yet in 1915 the Prime Minister would still find it necessary to forward to the Governor General's private secretary a despatch with the following covering sentence: "I am to request that His Royal Highness may be humbly moved to cause His Majesty's Ambassador in Washington to be informed in this sense." Great though Borden's achievements were, they must be placed in their proper setting. Had it not been for the gallant men who stood fast at Ypres, stormed Regina Trench, climbed the heights of Vimy Ridge, captured Passchendaele, and entered Mons on November 11, 1918, Sir Robert's arguments would have carried far less weight. It was Canadian blood which purchased the title deeds to Canadian autonomy in foreign affairs. Nevertheless Sir Robert had every right to be proud of his successes. Under his leadership, and with the

¹ Two papers by young historians employed in the Historical Division of the Department of External Affairs were devoted to Christie and presented to the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association in 1970. Alex I. Inglis discussed "Loring Christie and the Imperial Idea 1919-1926" and John A. Munro "Loring Christie and Canadian External Relations", 1935-1939. A Memorandum by Christie on "Canada's International Status Developments at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919" was published in *External Affairs*, April, 1964. James Eayrs regards Christie as "... largely responsible for whatever intellectual coherence Canadian external policy possessed during the period 1918-1921. In *Defence of Canada, from the Great War to the Great Depression* (Toronto, n.d.), p. 23.

powerful help of General Smuts, the Imperial War Conference of 1917 had agreed that the Dominions and India were entitled to an "adequate" voice in "foreign policy". Five years later Smuts wrote to Borden. "You and I have transformed the structure of the British Empire". In 1918 the Dominion Prime Ministers were authorised to cable directly to the British Prime Minister upon important matters. At the Peace Conference, Sir Robert and his colleagues who were members of the British Empire Delegation signed the Treaty of Versailles on behalf of their respective countries. In the new League of Nations the Dominions except Newfoundland were to be represented individually. The Big Three agreed, after Sir Robert had argued the claim, that the British Empire's permanent membership on the League Council did not preclude any Dominion from seeking election as a non-permanent member of that body. It was too soon to talk of an independent Canadian foreign policy, but it was no longer possible to declare, as Prime Minister Asquith has done in 1911, that authority in foreign policy could not be shared by the United Kingdom with the Dominions. As Christie wrote at the time "... the Dominions have asserted a sovereign status of some sort and have for some purposes entered the Family of Nations".¹

Back in Ottawa in May 1919, Sir Robert proceeded to consolidate the ground he had won. He insisted that the Canadian Parliament should give its approval to the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles despite pleas from London that, on the grounds of urgency, he should be content with having the King "by a single act" bind the whole Empire. At the special session of Parliament for that purpose, the Liberal critic who scoffed at the alleged progress was told bluntly by the Prime Minister that he was "dealing in ancient history and that his ideas should advance with the progress of recent years". Mindful of the valuable contacts with the United States that had resulted from the establishment of a Canadian War Mission in Washington, Borden decided to secure British approval for a separate Canadian diplomatic mission there. While careful to declare that the Canadian government wished to "maintain and even emphasize the solidarity of the Empire" the Prime Minister stressed the need for distinctive representation by a Canadian Minister who "shall receive his instructions from and shall report to the Secretary of State for External Affairs". Both he and his staff were to "constitute a part of the establishment of His Majesty's Embassy". The

¹ The second volume of Documents on Canadian External Relations is edited by R. A. MacKay and entirely devoted to the Paris Peace Conference. It gives ample evidence of Borden's influence and the respect in which he was held. Robert Craig Brown has written an admirable essay on "Sir Robert Borden, The Great War and Anglo-Canadian Relations" for the volume *Character and Circumstance, Essays in Honour of Donald Grant Creighton*, edited by John S. Moir (Toronto, 1970).

British government was inclined to stress the rôle of the proposed Minister as head of "the Canadian Branch of the Embassy" who would take charge of the whole Embassy in the absence of the Ambassador. The compromise statement, made simultaneously to the two Parliaments in May 1920, left the precise location of the mission somewhat vague, although it did specify that the Canadian Minister should take charge of the whole Embassy in the Ambassador's absence and that the change did not denote "any departure . . . from the principle of the diplomatic unity of the British Empire".

When Borden was succeeded by Meighen as Prime Minister in 1920 the latter was harassed by too many pressing domestic issues to devote as much attention to external affairs as his predecessor. That may explain his failure to follow up Sir Robert's victory by appointing a Canadian Minister to the United States or to press for the post-war Imperial Constitutional Conference which had been envisaged in the resolution concerning foreign policy in 1917. In fact Meighen agreed with his fellow Prime Ministers when they met in 1921 that no advantage would be gained by holding such a conference. On the other hand, he was just as keenly aware as any of his precursors that it was in Canada's interest to make every effort to avert discord between the British Empire and the United States. In that country suspicion and dislike of Japanese policy in the Far East was rapidly increasing because of the aggressive manner in which Japan was exploiting the weakness of both China and Russia.

Before coming to London Meighen had suggested, after some discreet soundings in Washington, that the Anglo-Japanese alliance should be terminated and a Pacific conference be held to establish a new system of security. He offered to send Sir Robert Borden "who is willing to act" to discuss the project in Washington. Lloyd George, though vaguely sympathetic, thought there were considerations "against immediate adoption of your proposal". Consequently, when the Prime Ministers discussed the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Canada was found in opposition to the British and Australian governments which favoured retaining the tie with Japan. Fortified by an unexpected opinion from the Lord Chancellor that the Alliance did not expire as soon as was anticipated, the Prime Ministers postponed action and managed to press the diplomatic unity of the British Empire. At the subsequent Washington Conference they accepted the supersession of the Alliance by new and vaguer diplomatic combinations in the Far East. In view of the rôle of Canada in London it was somewhat exasperating that the United States made no effort, possibly at the instance of the British Foreign Office, to, invite her or any other Dominion individually to attend the Conference, but simply extended an invitation to the British government. Both Smuts of South Africa and Hughes of

Australia were irritated by this omission, but the Canadian Prime Minister seems to have taken it more calmly. He did, however, take care to inform London that Canada expected the Dominion representatives to "hold the same status as at Paris". It was on that basis that Sir Robert Borden agreed to represent Canada.

During the next five years the British Empire with a single foreign policy became the British Commonwealth of Nations in which each Dominion as an "autonomous community" had the right to pursue, if it so wished, its own foreign policy. Some, like the new Irish Free State, went out of their way to do so. Some, like New Zealand, disliked the new order and clung to the past as much as possible. Canada, as has so often happened, exercised its sovereign powers pragmatically when and where it seemed desirable, but did not shout from the housetops to draw attention to all that had been secured. In this policy of discreetly acquiring and cautiously demonstrating its right of independent action the King government was greatly assisted by Dr. O. D. Skelton of Queen's University. Largely on the strength of his biography of Laurier he was invited to act as special adviser to Prime Minister King at the Imperial Conference of 1923. He formally entered the Department of External Affairs the following year and became its official head when Pope retired in 1925. Skelton has been accused of being "anti-British" by Vincent Massey but may be more fairly described as C. P. Stacey puts it of having in the pre-war years "a bias towards neutralism".

On some matters of external policy the King government which took office in December, 1921 carried on where the Conservatives had left off. Thus it too tried to induce the League of Nations to delete Article Ten from the League Covenant in the belief that it carried too sweeping commitments for a country which would rank as a producer of security rather than consumer. An interpretative resolution eventually conceded the substance of the Canadian request, but Europeans opposed to the steady watering-down of obligations sought to sharpen the teeth of the League by the Protocol of Geneva in 1924. The Canadian spokesman in Geneva expressed his doubts and drew attention to Canada's "fireproof house" remote from European inflammable materials. Like Britain, Canada rejected the Protocol. While the King Government remained suspicious of the League's becoming an international war office and of its European orientation the government steadily supported the World Court and stressed the value of the League as a centre of social and economic co-operation. In 1925, it appointed a Canadian, W. A. Riddell, then in the International Labour Organization, as its Advisory Officer in Geneva. Riddell had no diplomatic status, but helped to underline Canada's emergence as an international personality and did add to the Department of External Affairs' scanty stock of comment on international developments as assessed by Canadians.

It was in Washington, appropriately enough, that the Liberal government first chose to demonstrate Canada's increased status. After negotiating a treaty to regulate halibut fishing on the Pacific Coast, a question which could concern Canada and no other British state, it insisted that the treaty should be signed only by the Canadian Minister of Marine and Fisheries and without the co-signature of the British Ambassador in the United States. The British government agreed and a new precedent had been created which was upheld at the Imperial Conference in 1923. The previous year Ottawa like Pretoria had given an evasive answer to urgent appeals for help from the British government when it seemed to be on the verge of war with Turkey. There had been no consultations before this Chanak Crisis and Prime Minister King was not disposed to say "Ready Aye Ready we stand by you" as Mr. Meighen would have done. In England Bonar Law, soon to be Prime Minister, criticized Lloyd George and his colleagues for taking "a risk with our Dominions which no wise man would have taken". In other Dominions there was sharp criticism of the inept handling of the question which contributed to the fall of the Lloyd George government. Of this crisis Professor Mansergh has written that "Chanak became a landmark in Commonwealth history because Mackenzie King made it so."

To use Dawson's phrase, the period of decentralisation in imperial policy was well under way. More by omission than commission the Imperial Conference of 1923, where Canada, South Africa and the Irish Free State argued on similar lines, rejected the earlier glittering concept of an Imperial Cabinet shaping a foreign policy directed from Downing Street. At the close of the conference Smuts remarked to Mackenzie King "You ought to be satisfied. Canada has had her way in everything." Three years later the Balfour Report proclaimed the equality of status but not of function of the Dominions with the United Kingdom and, behind its smoke-screen of skilful verbal generalities, encouraged the legal pundits to eliminate the resulting inconsistencies which an Imperial Statute (Westminster, 1931) would correct. The Governor General ceased to represent the British Government as well as the Sovereign. Consequently he ceased to be the channel of communication between the British and Canadian governments. After July 1, 1927, communications from the British Government were addressed directly to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. In keeping with the new situation Britain sent a High Commissioner, Sir William Clark, to Ottawa in 1928.

By the time he arrived another event had taken place, of even greater significance. At long last a Canadian Minister had been appointed to Washington. In February 1927, Vincent Massey presented his credentials to President Coolidge. He gathered around him a singularly able staff, four of whom were to serve at various

times as Ambassadors, High Commissioners, Under-Secretaries of State for External Affairs and Minister of External Affairs. What happened in Washington could be quoted as a precedent for action elsewhere, despite the anguished cries of some Conservatives that it implied the break-up of the Empire. In 1928 it was announced that the Canadian Office in Paris would become a Legation and that the first Canadian Mission in the Far East would be established in Tokyo.

As a result of these developments, by 1929 the Department of External Affairs supervised offices or Legations in London, Washington, Paris, Geneva and Tokyo. It was still a modest establishment with only nineteen officers of Foreign Service rank, seven serving in Ottawa and the rest abroad. Its entire cost for the fiscal year 1929-1930 was still less than three-quarters of a million dollars.

It is not surprising that the steady advance in the international status of Canada which had taken place since 1917 should be followed in the thirties by a period of consolidation that bordered on quiescence. With the adoption of the Statute of Westminster Canada ceased to agitate at Imperial Conferences for further concessions in order to clarify her position as a sovereign power. Unlike Ireland and South Africa she entered the ranks of the contented Dominions. The onslaught of the Great Depression strengthened this tendency to passivity. For almost a decade, whichever party was in power, it was almost entirely preoccupied with the difficulties created at home by falling prices, shrinking markets, declining revenues and rising unemployment. The defeat of the King government in 1930 could be attributed to the depression. The Bennett regime was hard at work during its five year tenure of office endeavouring with more vigour than success to "blast its way into the markets of the world". Under such conditions economy in administration was the order of the day for every department of government. The Department of External Affairs with the Prime Minister as its Minister could obviously be no exception to the rule. The result was an almost complete cessation of staff recruiting despite the fewness of its personnel. There was even a tendency to raid its scanty ranks for other duties. Thus, Mr. L. B. Pearson was called upon to act as Secretary of the Royal Commission on Price Spreads. The annual report of the Department for 1931, which listed the personnel from Tokyo to Geneva, revealed the fact that the largest number of foreign service officers in any one mission was four in Washington — and one of these also served as Commercial Secretary. There were few in Canada who noticed or criticized this failure to improve the efficiency of the Department or who realized that any attempt at a successful initiative in foreign policy must be based upon the services of personnel competent to inform and to advise the Cabinet, and to implement any decisions it might make.

However, at the first unofficial conference on British Commonwealth Relations, held in Toronto in 1933 and attended by delegations from six Commonwealth countries, there was some discussion of this problem, one which was not peculiar to Canada. Professor Toynbee, the conference recorder, noted in the volume of proceedings that papers from study groups of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs made some references to the shortage of staff in Ottawa and quoted the comment of one of them:

“We realize that these services are of such recent origin that their number and experience are necessarily limited, but we regard as essential an extension in numbers and a rigorous insistence upon a personnel of high capacity and proper training:”

Some slight expansion did take place in the latter half of the decade, but there were still only 32 foreign service officers at home or abroad when war came and again brought with it enormously increased responsibilities. In the words of one of the veterans of the service, Dr. H. L. Keenleyside, “. . . the Department had barely enough trained or partly trained officials to attend to the most essential responsibilities”. Under such conditions the Canadian government necessarily had leaned heavily upon the British Foreign Office for assistance in capitals where Canada was not represented (which meant most of the world), for the performance of consular duties everywhere, and for much information received via the Dominions Office.

The return of the Conservatives to office under R. B. Bennett had caused other anxieties for the Department of External Affairs. As leader of the Opposition he had sharply criticized the establishment of the Legation in Tokyo. Whereas Prime Minister King had seen in its creation “an application of the principles of the Balfour Report”, Bennett detected in it a threat to Empire security. As he asked rhetorically, “can the empire survive if it has six representatives in a given community following different courses with respect to a matter of concern between the capital in which they find their homes and their several countries?” What would Bennett do about this new Legation when in office? However, as Prime Minister, the Tory Imperialist (whom Neville Chamberlain described as “having strained our patience to the limit” at the Ottawa Economic Conference in 1932) did not close down any of the missions abroad. He contented himself with expressing the hope that in time there would be “. . . a clearer appreciation of their value in the field of commercial activities”. Nor did the Prime Minister remove from office the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs whose appointment five years previously had reflected in part his Liberal loyalties. Skelton was not taken to London as the Prime Minister’s chief

adviser for the Imperial Conference of 1930 but scrupulous performance of his duties as a civil servant and his outstanding ability soon made him as trusted an adviser of Bennett as he had been of King. On the other hand, the new Prime Minister saw to it that a Conservative filled the post just made vacant in Washington by Massey who was not allowed to take up his new post as High Commissioner in London. Howard Ferguson, the Conservative Prime Minister of Ontario took over the position.

When Mackenzie King again assumed office as Prime Minister in October 1935 he, too, was in no hurry to increase Canadian representation abroad. Not until over three years later were any further legations established and these only in response to the initiative of other countries. As early as 1937 Belgium had secured agreement for the opening of a Legation in Ottawa with the customary understanding that there should be reciprocal action. In January 1939 it was announced that the Counsellor of the Canadian Embassy in Paris, Mr. Jean Désy, had been accredited to the Royal Courts of both Belgium and the Netherlands and would divide his time equally between the two posts. He was to be assisted by a junior foreign service officer in each country. But it should be noted that Canada made no attempt to send a High Commissioner to the capital of any Commonwealth country other than the United Kingdom before the outbreak of war. Such an omission reflected an attitude common to all the overseas Dominions, the tendency to think of Commonwealth relations almost exclusively in terms of the connection between the country in question and the United Kingdom. British Commonwealth delegations at League assemblies might consult together and quite frequently act in unison on some question of policy. They might work together to secure the unwritten convention that one of the elected members of the League Council should come from the Dominions — Canada being the first to score that success in 1927 — despite Mackenzie King's dislike of the innovation — but on the whole they seldom concerned themselves with developing closer relations among themselves.

It was not only the pause to take stock and the Great Depression which retarded the practice of Canadian autonomy in external affairs. The Thirties were years of anxiety and uncertainty, of negativism, appeasement and disillusionment in foreign policy. The dictators were becoming increasingly assertive and aggressive in demands for living space or equality, for a free hand in enforcing their rights or for extension of their borders. The unhappy experiences of China, Ethiopia and Czechoslovakia were not such as to encourage a small country, even if it were remote from immediate danger, to play a conspicuous part in upholding a principle or punishing an offender.

As Japan, Italy and Germany took turns in defying the *status*

quo and their treaty obligations, lesser states like Canada found themselves drawn into international affairs to an extent which they found alarming and uncomfortable. The search for status which had been pursued so skilfully and persistently in the decade between 1917 and 1927 had been successful, but it had also brought with it necessarily the assumption of responsibilities. These responsibilities were all the more harassing since the United States was not bound by such obligations as Canada had accepted and was immersed in an isolationist mood which was well illustrated by the adoption of neutrality legislation in 1935, and the distaste for any programme of "quarantining" aggressors such as President Roosevelt vaguely suggested in his Chicago speech of 1937. In such circumstances Canadian governments pursued a course which one critic described as a "back seat" policy, a description to which Prime Minister King took no exception. Thus, in 1932, when the League was struggling with the Manchurian crisis and the leader of the C.C.F., J. S. Woodsworth, tried to secure some indication of Canadian policy he was told by Prime Minister Bennett that he "did not think it would be wise . . . that we should endeavour, with the slight knowledge that we possess, . . . either to blame or to praise this country or the other in matters so serious as those involved in the differences between Japan and China". Three years later, when Italy invaded Abyssinia and the veteran Canadian Advisory Officer in Geneva, W. A. Riddell, took the lead in the Committee which was studying the intensification of sanctions against the aggressor, without the express approval of his government, he was disavowed by Ottawa, which publicly stated that he was expressing "his own personal opinion . . . and not the views of the Canadian government". Later it was explained that the government was not necessarily opposed to stiffer sanctions but did not think it appropriate that Canada should take the initiative. As had been said earlier in a debate at Geneva on disarmament, Canada favoured "using the League of Nations as a channel through which international public opinion can express itself rather than by developing it into a Super State". Emphasis upon "no commitments" and the right of Parliament to decide also reflected a deep anxiety that a bold policy in international affairs might underline Canadian unity. The endemic distrust of being drawn into the vortex of European militarism, which Laurier had expressed a generation ago, was still powerful in Quebec, where the ghost of conscription as applied in the First World War had never been laid. At the time of the tension caused by the German army's re-entry into the Rhineland in defiance of the Locarno Treaties (March 1936) Prime Minister King vividly summarized the attitude of his government, his party and the greater part of the country. "I believe", he said, "that Canada's first duty to the League and to the British Empire, with respect to all the great issues that come up, is, if possible, to keep this country united." At the Imperial Con-

ference of 1937, the delegates turned away from questions of status and trade to concentrate on discussions of defence in which the emphasis was upon decentralization and local responsibility. They carefully avoided any ringing declaration in support of collective security as New Zealand would have wished. General Hertzog epitomised the outlook when he observed "in the attainment of this high objective of world appeasement the mission of the Commonwealth was clearly defined". The "nightmare" of war in 1938, as King termed it, over Czechoslovakia was dispelled by Chamberlain's surrender to Hitler at Munich. Mackenzie King then cabled him "The heart of Canada is rejoicing to-night at the success which has crowned your unremitting efforts to peace".

Yet it should be added that after the Imperial Conference of 1937 Prime Minister King went to Berlin and made it perfectly clear to Hitler that ". . . if there was a war of aggression, nothing in the world would keep the Canadian people from being at the side of Britain". What was then said privately and not revealed until seven years later was underlined publicly in the spring of 1939 when the war clouds were rolling across the international horizon. Hitler's annexation of the rest of Czechoslovakia, his threat to Poland, and the resulting complete shift in British policy (without consultation with the Dominions) made it necessary for the Government to be more explicit.

While asking for time to clarify the issues before the government declared its policy the Prime Minister did declare in the House of Commons that if there were a prospect of an aggressor launching an attack on Britain, with bombers raining death on London, "I have no doubt what the decision of the Canadian people and parliament would be".

Some Canadians felt that Canada's legal position in the event of war should be clarified. In 1914, when Britain declared war on Germany, Canada was automatically at war with that country. Was this still true or had the Statute of Westminster left each Dominion free to make its own decision uncommitted to war by a British declaration? Mr. J. T. Thorson, a Liberal M.P. from Manitoba, who was supported in a statement signed by sixty well-known Canadians, presented a resolution to the House of Commons in 1938 proclaiming Canada's right to decide whether or not she might remain neutral in the event of war. Mr. Thorson was careful to stress the fact that what interested him was the clarification of the *right* of neutrality, rather than the *exercise* of that right. But the Prime Minister argued that the affirmation of this right might give aid and comfort to a potential aggressor and cause within Canada "passionate controversy and acute differences of opinion". Accordingly the resolution was talked out in the debate and no action taken.

Nevertheless, when war did come to Europe the Canadian government proceeded to demonstrate the reality of Canada's sovereignty in international affairs. As recently as August 8 the Prime Minister had told a Toronto audience, "One thing I will not do and cannot be persuaded to do is to say what Canada will do in regard to a situation that may arise at some future time and under circumstances of which we know nothing." Like Roosevelt he had vainly appealed to Hitler, Mussolini and the President of Poland to do all in their power to negotiate a peaceful settlement of the German-Polish differences. When Hitler, deaf to all appeals and fortified by his non-aggression pact with Stalin, sent his troops into Poland the time had come for decision. The Canadian Prime Minister, in accordance with his oft-repeated pledge, summoned Parliament for a special session on September 7 to decide what should be done. In the meantime, Britain declared war on Germany (September 3) and the Canadian government proceeded to take all measures short of war in close co-operation with the United Kingdom. But Canada's status as a non-belligerent was formally recognized by the United States when the President issued a declaration of neutrality on September 5. This proclamation enumerated as belligerents from the British Commonwealth and the United Kingdom, India, Australia and New Zealand. The President had omitted Canada after telephoning Mr. King and his action was a most significant recognition of what had happened in the previous quarter-century. When Parliament convened, the Speech from the Throne called for approval of a declaration of war upon Germany. After a stirring debate, in which the veteran CCF leader, J. S. Woodsworth was listened to in respectful silence while he reaffirmed his lifelong belief in pacificism and Ernest Lapointe made a powerful argument against the feasibility of neutrality the House of Commons accepted the government's recommendation. There was no recorded vote since less than five members had risen in opposition. In the Senate there was unanimous approval. Parliament had decided that Canada could not stand aside from the Second World War.

On Sunday morning, September 10, Canada House received a cable requesting the King to issue a proclamation ". . . in the name of His Majesty in Canada, declaring that a state of war with the German Reich has existed in Canada as and from September tenth". The cable was copied on a sheet of ordinary lined foolscap paper which the High Commissioner, Mr. Vincent Massey, immediately took to Windsor Castle. King George VI wrote upon it, "Approved, George R.I.". With his signature another major precedent had been established which defined the reality of Canada's status as an independent state. From the Prime Minister, who drafted the submission in his capacity as Secretary of State for External Affairs, to the cypher clerk who encoded it, the members of the Department of External Affairs had fittingly played their part.

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