

CANADA: North American Partner

Arthur R. Ford

TO view our subject in the proper perspective, it might be wise to obtain a picture of Canada and its relations to Great Britain and the rest of the Empire at the beginning of the century. In 1900 there was no Commonwealth of Nations. We were still a part of the Empire, and were just emerging from colonialism. Canada was only 33 years old as a confederation. Australia as a Commonwealth was only established in that year. New Zealand and Newfoundland were still outposts of the Empire. In South Africa war was being bitterly waged and the future of the British colonies was very much in the balance. India was the Imperialistic India of Kipling.

Great Britain was in 1900 at the zenith of her power. The boast that the sun never set on the Empire was literally true. She not only controlled the Seven Seas, but she was the dominant world power. Imperialism as such was at its height. Only three years before Queen Victoria had celebrated the 60th year of her reign with a glory, a pomp and a pageantry, mindful of the days of Imperial Rome.

Canada was in 1900 too busy in developing her resources and in spreading across the Prairies to the Pacific to be interested in world affairs. We had no External Affairs department and no foreign policy. Upon Great Britain and all her power we depended for any protection. She con-

trolled our diplomacy: even in sending troops to the Boer Wars, we allowed Great Britain to pay them; they were simply auxiliaries of an Imperial Army. We were still colonial in our outlook and Imperial in our thought.

What a change the last 50 years has made in the world position of Canada as a member of the Commonwealth and as an international power! It has been a long and tedious growth. Canada's participation in two Great Wars changed her outlook and stimulated the movement towards participation as an independent power in world affairs. Every prime minister, Liberal and Conservative, has played his part. Today Canada has abandoned her policy of isolation. We are a world power, and an influential member of the United Nations and a member of the North Atlantic Pact.

When I lived in Ottawa as a member of the Press Gallery before and during all the period of the First Great War there was only one foreign representative in the capital. He was from the United States and only had the position of consul general, without any diplomatic standing. Today every member of the Commonwealth had its representative at Ottawa, and there is an imposing list of ambassadors and ministers, most with their own handsome embassies. Canada had only two representatives abroad, that of High Commissioner in England, a post which had

been set up as early as 1880, and an Agent General in France without diplomatic status. Today we have our own ambassadors in all the great world capitals and Ottawa has become an international capital.

It was not until 1909 that Sir Wilfred Laurier set up the Department of External Affairs. In that year he decided that the Dominion had attained a position of sufficient independent importance to warrant the establishment of such a department. There was considerable cabinet discussion as to the name of the new department. As at that time the most important of Canada's relations abroad were with the Mother Country and the other Dominions it was felt that the designation Foreign Office was unsuitable. Hence it was decided to use the title Department of External Affairs. It was placed under the Secretary of State with Sir Joseph Pope, who was Under-Secretary of State, doubling as Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs with a few of his regular officials and clerks functioning as staff.

Sir Robert Borden after he became Prime Minister decided that the new department should have a minister of its own. Sir Robert became Minister of External Affairs as well as Prime Minister and this joint arrangement was continued almost until the end of the King regime.

The first Canadian official who was directly responsible for external affairs was Loring Christie, who later became a Minister at Washington. He was a Nova Scotian, a graduate of Dalhousie University and Harvard. Sir Robert found him as a young man in a key position at the State Department at Washington and he persuaded him to come to Ottawa. He accompanied Sir Robert on most of his trips to England during the war and was present at the Treaty of Versailles as Canadian counsellor.

II

IN the early days of the century, the Boer War and Alaskan Boundary dispute did much to alter Canadian thinking.

The opposition of Henri Bourassa to Canadian participation in the Boer War led to the emergence of the Nationalist party in Quebec. The Alaskan Boundary award—when Lord Alverstone, as the British Commissioner and chairman, voted with the Americans—brought a strong feeling of protest in English Canada against Canadian interests being sacrificed by British diplomacy. It gave an impetus to the movement that Canada in future should stand on her own feet in diplomatic negotiations with the United States. Then came the First Great War when Canada sprang to her arms. What was first believed to be a march to Berlin proved a life and death struggle in which Canada threw her whole weight beside Great Britain.

No one can read Borden's Memoirs without being impressed by his staunch and sturdy Canadianism and the part he played in the First Great War and in the making of peace. He was forthright in his attitude. He objected strenuously early in the war to the lack of information he could obtain as to its conduct and complained that the Dominions were being merely "toy automata". He protested the position of British statesmen, arrogating to themselves solely "the methods by which the war was to be carried on."

After the retirement of Asquith as prime minister and the formation of a coalition ministry under Lloyd George there was established an inner war cabinet of five. Lloyd George, realizing the feeling of Borden and the prime ministers of the other Dominions, saw that this was not sufficient and that the help and the advice of the Dominions were necessary. An invitation was issued to the prime ministers of the Dominion and a representative from India to join with the war cabinet. There have been no published reports of this cabinet, but it played a forceful part in the control of higher strategy and later, when the war ended, and during the formation of peace terms, Sir Robert was the recognized leader of the Dominions.

At that time it was felt that the Imperial War Cabinet should become a permanent institution. The idea was that there should be a joint foreign policy for

the whole Empire. The policy of equality of nationhood for the component parts of the Empire had come to fruition. In future the Dominions must have a voice in foreign policy. Sir Robert was responsible for a resolution which was passed unanimously that there should be a readjustment of the constitutional relations of the various parts of the Empire.

The idea of an Imperial War Cabinet was abandoned. The policy of "equality of nations" within a Commonwealth of Nations took a different form, but it was Borden who made the first practical move. Whether, if he had remained in politics, he would have approved of later developments, is another question.

The war over, it was Borden both at the Imperial War Cabinet and again at Versailles who took the lead in the fight to have Canada represented on the basis of the smaller nations, both at the Peace Conference and the League of Nations.

At one stage Borden even debated with his colleagues returning home. He tells with amusement pleading with Botha to hold their own with Patagonia at the Peace Conference. To Borden more than any other man should be given the credit for first obtaining for Canada national status amongst the powers of the world.

III

DURING the short period that Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen was Prime Minister he attended the Imperial Conference in 1921. It was the first conference since 1912 when the Dominions were only informed on British policy. The Dominions had no say in the formation of foreign policy. Mr. Meighen has never been given the credit he deserves for the part he played in the 1921 conference. It was his single-handed fight against the giants of the British Cabinet as well as the prime ministers of Australia and New Zealand, which prevented renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance.

Mr. Meighen with all his analytical skill opposed renewal of the alliance in any form. He took the stand that the reasons for its existence were incompatible

with the ideals of the League of Nations. The United States, which was suspicious of Japanese motives, would regard the renewal of the treaty with mistrust. Good Anglo-American relations, he urged were vital and the hope of the world. He suggested a conference about Pacific affairs among the British Empire, China, Japan, and the United States.

It was a bold and daring stand for the Canadian Prime Minister, who represented a party which always stood for closer imperial relations, to defy the British Government and Australia and New Zealand. He was vehemently opposed by Prime Minister Rhodes of Australia. The debate was never made public, but it was a great triumph for Meighen when renewal of the Alliance was shelved. Before the conference was ended President Harding had called a Disarmament Conference at Washington and this bigger issue ended the debate. Mr. Meighen was the first prime minister to take a stand at an Imperial Conference on foreign policy. His position altered history as far as the second Great War was concerned.

THEN followed the long regime of the Rt. Hon. Mackenzie King. He also was Minister of External Affairs as well as Prime Minister. His first step was to appoint Dr. O. D. Skelton as Under-Secretary for the department. Dr. Skelton proceeded to build up a fine department of brilliant young men, bringing into the department such men as L. B. Pearson, (today Minister of the Department), Dr. Keenleyside and Hume Wrong. To him must go the credit for the establishment of what is perhaps the best department in Ottawa. It was not until 1926—the year the Imperial Conference defined the Dominions as "autonomous communities within the British Commonwealth" and foreshadowed the Statute of Westminster which was passed in 1931 when Rt. Hon. R. B. Bennett was prime Minister—that the first minister at Washington, Hon. Vincent Massey, was appointed. It was under the regime of Mr. King that the Department of External Affairs grew to its present size until today Canada has its diplomatic agencies all over the world.

Canada's treaty-making rights were early established after Mr. King's return to office. In 1923 a convention was signed between Canada and the United States for the regulation of the halibut fisheries on the Pacific Coast. The Canadian Government insisted that it should be signed alone by the Canadian minister of fisheries, the Hon. Ernest Lapointe, who was appointed by King as a commissioner for this purpose. As Canada had no ambassador at Washington at that time the question arose whether the British Ambassador should sign conjointly with the Canadian plenipotentiaries. The Canadian Government maintained that the treaty affected only Canada and the United States and that Canada should sign in her own right. There was wide criticism at the time, but the principles on which the Canadian Government acted were ultimately embodied in the Statute of Westminster. It meant that Canada would in future make her own treaties and do her own diplomatic negotiating. There would not be another Alaskan Boundary affair which stirred up such feeling early in the century.

The final step before the demonstration of our national maturity was our separate declaration of war in September, 1939. The old theory enunciated by Laurier himself, that when Britain was at war Canada was automatically at war, no longer held. Later Canada actually declared war against Japan before Great Britain.

IV

THIS brief and perhaps inadequate review brings us to the half century. Where does Canada stand and what about the future? The British Commonwealth of Nations as such has disappeared, in place of it is the Commonwealth of Nations. This change was made particularly necessary by the fact that India is today an independent Republic and yet apparently wants to remain within the orbit of the Commonwealth. There are also two new members of the Commonwealth, Ceylon and Pakistan, which could hardly by any

stretch of the imagination be described as British.

Will the Commonwealth break up? Certainly the days of the old Imperial Conferences are a thing of the past. In the future the only conferences will be such as were held in London two years ago or at Ceylon recently—a meeting on an equal basis of the heads of governments.

What about Canada? There is no question that the future of the Commonwealth nations will depend largely upon the leadership of Canada. This was made very obvious lately in a speech by Prime Minister Malan of South Africa in which he indicated that if Canada were dissatisfied with her position in the Commonwealth and pulled out South Africa would follow her leadership.

Canada has always had three possible futures—annexation with the United States, the setting up of a Republic or remaining within the Commonwealth completely independent and autonomous as we are at present, with a common King with Great Britain. Annexation at various times during our history has cropped up as a possible solution for the future. However there was never a time when there was so little agitation for annexation as at present. Apart from any other reasons, Canada has so developed in national spirit and sentiment, our future as a great nation is so assured, that annexation can be forgotten.

There is occasional agitation for a Republic, largely centered in Quebec with one newspaper having this as its chief objective. But there is a deep ingrained feeling that we prefer our parliamentary system under a constitutional monarchy to the dangers which have proven inherent over the years to republics. Our present system makes a stability of government which, so far, has not been found under any other democratic parliamentary system yet devised by the ingenuity of man. Canadians generally today are prepared to accept this system, not only for sentimental reasons, and there is still a lot of sentiment in our connection with Great Britain, but on practical grounds.

We have reached the stage now where independence is complete. There can

be no more shouting about autonomy and particularly if a Canadian is chosen as Governor-General. We must either continue our constitutional monarchy or become a Republic. Taking for granted that we continue as a monarchy with the King of England as the King of Canada what is our place and our position in the Commonwealth of Nations and international politics?

In the first place, should the Commonwealth of Nations as such be continued? In this troubled world there is no question as to the need. It is a sort of League of Nations within the United Nations. Despite the heterogenous character of its component parts they have generally the same ideals of freedom and liberty. If the Commonwealth of Nations should break up into a series of small independent Republics, democracy the world over would be poorer, and their safety would all be endangered. Why is India, a republic, remaining within the Commonwealth of Nations? Because she wants to feel that Britain and the Dominions are prepared to give her moral, economic and possibly military support. If it continues then Canada, as potentially one of the richest members of the Commonwealth, should be prepared in future as she has in the past to give leadership. Canada's influence and voice in the United Nations and international matters would be greater if she speaks not as a small nation by herself, but as a member of and leader in the Commonwealth of Nations.

We will gain nothing in prestige or in national safety by becoming a Republic. We will lose the strength of unity which we now derive from a world-wide Commonwealth. We will leave ourselves more open to attack. Moreover we will divide the Canadian people itself because there

are millions of Canadians who are proud of our British background and connection and feel a sense of pride in recognizing the King of England as also our King.

Leaving the Commonwealth now would be a serious blow to the United Kingdom, lower its prestige in the world and in Europe and give the Communists a great uplift in morale. It would mean the break up of the Commonwealth, as South Africa and the Asiatic Dominions would follow suit. This would, in the present state of world affairs, be a real disservice to the cause of peace.

Fifty years has seen a vast change in the British situation. Today Great Britain, drained white by her sacrifices in two wars, and with a world economic situation completely altered, is no longer the dominant member of the Commonwealth she was in 1900. Canada with her vast resources and her strategic world position has great responsibilities. She must be prepared to play a more important role in world affairs and in Commonwealth leadership. The time may even come when she will be the dominant partner.

It would be a bold man who would make any predictions for the next 50 years, so great and so amazing have been the changes in the first half century. My predictions are based only on my own hopes that we continue in the next fifty years to maintain our connection with Great Britain, slender as it may be. History and traditions mean something in this world and Britain down the centuries has been the Gibraltar of Freedom. It should strengthen our own love of liberty and freedom to know that we stand with her and with the other members of the Commonwealth in an effort to build a better world and permanent peace.