

in danger of being checked by memoranda.⁵ Robertson, a former and future Under-Secretary, shared the view that while the Minister was away there was a natural tendency for an acting Minister 'to take to Cabinet questions which a full-time Minister at his desk will try to dispose of either by himself or in direct consultation with those of his Cabinet colleagues most interested in a particular question.'⁶ But it was not until mid-December that Pearson returned to Ottawa, where his close working relationship with Louis St. Laurent, by then Prime Minister, eased further consideration of the fundamental questions of foreign policy.

One issue on which St. Laurent and Pearson had found themselves opposed by Mackenzie King was the question of how Canada should respond to the Soviet blockade of Berlin and the resultant airlift by western allies. Unfortunately, the first approach for Canadian aid came from the British (Documents 491 and 494) and was leaked to the press. To King, this was reminiscent of the Chanak Crisis of 1922, seared in his memory as an attempt by a bellicose British government to stampede his government into blind support for British military intervention at the margins of imperial interests. This reaction is easy to caricature, but King's caution was understandable and his fear that an incident involving a Canadian aircraft or pilot would be a *casus belli* for a Third World War was shared by someone not haunted by the spectre of Chanak, Brooke Claxton. King was certainly relieved when Claxton opposed participation in the airlift in the Cabinet (Document 498). The differences between Claxton and Pearson are covered in two letters (Documents 499 and 506).

As other Dominions responded positively to the British appeal for help, the public and private pressure on the Canadian Government mounted. Records from the Embassy in Washington make it clear that the State Department and American military authorities were also anxious that Canada should participate (Documents 521, 522, 528, 532 and 533), though it is also evident that Pearson played a part in stimulating this expression of concern (Documents 519 and 520). There is no doubt that the initial approach through London complicated consideration of the question in Ottawa, as did the outgoing Prime Minister's sense that war was imminent. That sentiment had first been aroused at a briefing by the British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, when King was in London in November 1947 for the Royal Wedding, and it was still present a year later when he retired. Not surprisingly, two weeks after King's departure, Pearson appealed to St. Laurent to reconsider the question (Document 535). By year's end, however, Canada was still a bystander.

The cold war was also a factor in Canada's relations with the rest of the Commonwealth, though King did not regard it as a sufficient reason to advance the date for the meeting of Prime Ministers. As that gathering loomed, there were also objections in Ottawa to implications in the British approach to defence relations that the Commonwealth should be a focus for collective security. However, many of the items on the agenda were familiar: relations between sterling and dollar countries; regular consultation among members and the status or designation of

⁵Pearson Papers/Vol.32: A.D.P. Heeney to L.B. Pearson, 19 November 1948.

⁶DEA/259-A(S): N.A. Robertson to E. Reid, 30 December 1948.