

In 1926, an Imperial Conference in London gave Canada and the other Dominions the right (ratified by the Statute of Westminster in 1931) to establish diplomatic missions abroad. In the final years of the 1920s, the department opened diplomatic posts in Washington, at the League of Nations in Geneva, and in Tokyo, and upgraded the status of its offices in Paris and London.

The move toward a separate diplomatic voice slowed during the hard times of the 1930s. Instead, trade and economic matters were given priority.

By the late 1930s, as yet another world war loomed, the

Department of External Affairs was still only a tiny ministry, with 11 officers at headquarters in Ottawa and seven posts abroad.

War and peacemaking

Canada made a major contribution to the Allied cause in World War II. This meant expanded ties abroad as new posts were opened across the Commonwealth, in Latin America and in Europe.

The war also brought additional responsibilities for the department at home—for instance, overseeing trade in strategic goods and gathering intelligence.



Louis St. Laurent and Lester B. Pearson committed Canada to an active and responsible internationalism during the late 1940s and 1950s.