

REFERENCE PAPERS

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CANADA AND THE INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM

".... I am convinced that Canadian participation in such an organization could be based only upon a wide general appreciation in this country of the purposes and responsibilities of the Pan American Union. I am not convinced that such appreciation now exists." Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King in the House of Commons, August 4, 1944.

According to a Gallup Poll the results of which were published in January, 1944, 72% of the adult population of Canada did not know what the Pan American Union is. Yet Canada is an American State and the Union of American States (of which the Pan American Union is the permanent secretariat and administrative agency) is the general international organization of the American States. If, as the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals suggest they may, regional organizations such as the Union of American States become important cogs in the world security system, the question of Canada's relationship to this Union may become a matter of the very greatest importance to every Canadian.

The purpose of this Reference Paper is to provide, in as concise a form as possible, a statement of the origins, constitution, purposes and nature of the various Pan American organizations and institutions which together make up the Inter-American System and the Pan American movement.

HISTORY OF THE PAN AMERICAN MOVEMENT

The history of the Pan American movement falls into two sharply defined periods: an early Spanish American period that began with the American wars of independence against Spain; and a modern period that began in 1889 with United States and Brazilian participation in the movement.

The father of the movement and the man whose spirit continues to dominate it was the Great Liberator, Simon Bolivar. Bolivar's great ambition was to create a confederation of American nations, the immediate purpose of which would have been to consolidate the recently won independence of the former Spanish colonies. (Under Bolivar's leadership the countries that today are Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru won their independence from Spain). To this end he invited all the former Spanish colonies, Brazil, the United States and even Great Britain (which was at that time an important American power) to send representatives to a congress to be held in Panama.

The Congress met in 1826. But of the 11 States invited only four were represented, although Great Britain sent an observer. The Congress never achieved the principal purpose for which it was convened. Nor indeed were any of the secondary objects achieved; for, while the Congress adopted four conventions, none of them ever came into force.

Notwithstanding the failure of Bolivar's great plan, various other attempts were made in the course of the nineteenth century to