

the eve of war, Mackenzie King stood fast against Australia and its prime minister's efforts to secure a final declaration of imperial solidarity.

Awkward Allies: 1939-1968

Mackenzie King's ambiguous attitude towards Britain and its empire disappeared with the outbreak of war in September 1939. A united Canada hurried to join Australia at Britain's side. The war heralded a new era in Canadian-Australian relations and gave the partnership an increasingly important political character. This transformation began smoothly. In the first days of the war, Canada renewed its suggestion that the two countries exchange high commissioners and Australia readily approved of a step that now appeared to affirm imperial unity. A businessman and former minister of defence, Sir William Glasgow, was quickly sent to Ottawa to head the new mission. At the same time, the Australian and Canadian high commissioners in London, S.M. Bruce and Vincent Massey respectively, took the lead in organizing support for the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, the centrepiece of Canada's early war effort. This gesture of Commonwealth solidarity, under which some 9,400 Australian airmen trained in Canada, did not go unappreciated. "The possibility of promoting better relations and more cooperation . . . is much better now than it was two years ago," Canada's first high commissioner to Australia, Charles Burchell, reported in May 1941.²²

Burchell's optimism was short-lived. Japan's entry into the war in December 1941 created widespread fear in Australia that the country might be overrun. Canada's apparent lack of interest in the Pacific War drew considerable criticism in the Australian press. Misled by Burchell's inexperienced successor, Major-General Victor Odlum, into believing that Canada was ready to assist Australia with men and munitions, the Australian minister of external affairs, Herbert Evatt, submitted an anxious request for help. Constrained by its war effort in Europe, Ottawa was unable to respond positively. Undeterred, the minister renewed his plea during a brief visit to Ottawa in April 1942. Again, despite some initially favourable indications, Canada could not meet the Australian request.

Evatt was bitterly disappointed. Ottawa's subsequent decision to provide Britain with \$1 billion dollars to purchase supplies added to his growing sense of grievance. When he encountered the Canadian chargé d'affaires a few days later, the minister exploded. The Australian's outburst was vividly described in a telegram to Ottawa:

It was a short but stormy interview. Dr. Evatt was in a very bad temper and referred to Canadians in general and the Canadian Government in particular in most offensive terms,