

Standard
legitimate
if logic
accepted

political scientist at the University of Winnipeg, agrees with many earlier writers on the subject that Canadian foreign policy in its relation to the League of Nations was a failure; but he goes further. It was a failure, Professor Veatch maintains, because Canadian policy was "primarily either neutral or harmful in its effects on the League's development and exercise of a capacity to prevent wars". In other words, Canada's policy was a success to the extent that it enabled the League to fulfil its policy goals, not to the extent that it enabled Canada to fulfil its own specific goals at the League and elsewhere, in the 1920s and 1930s. Applying this standard, Veatch argues that "even if Canada's policy goals had been successfully achieved, the resulting situation [war in 1939] was thoroughly unsatisfying" — hence his harsh judgment. Veatch's standard is unusual, particularly, I should think, to modern policymakers, but nonetheless legitimate if one accepts the logic of and the arguments for collective security. Professor Veatch obviously does; the problem is that few Canadians did. Veatch mentions this; Mackenzie King had to live with it.

Like so many studies of the inter-war years, *Canada and the League of Nations* possesses a certain aura of predestination, a sense that Hitler and Mussolini were inevitable. Thus, Canada's rather successful campaign to dismantle Article 10, the article of the Covenant that provided for a universal guarantee against aggression, is measured against the circumstances of the 1930s and not against those of the immediate postwar years, when the representatives of the Borden, Meighen and King Governments made their arguments. Let us consider those circumstances. Canada, at Britain's behest, had been recently involved in a foolish and futile intervention in Russia. The revolutionary spirit had flared up elsewhere, creating, in the Princeton historian Arno Mayer's judgment, a "new diplomacy", reactionary in ideology and interventionist in character. The former enemy, Germany, devastated by plundering, presented no threat. The former ally, France, lusting for spoils and revenge, did. It is in this context, a context Professor Veatch does not give, that Canada's early opposition to Article 10 becomes explicable and, some would say, justifiable.

Analysis weakened

This same absence of context considerably weakens Veatch's analysis of Mackenzie King's attitude towards the League in particular and foreign affairs in general. We are told that "King's attitude toward the

League of Nations was, to say the least, equivocal". As evidence, Veatch cites a 1919 King statement that he was "heart and soul" for the League with his "different" attitude in practice. But was it really so different? The League had major intentions. First, it was to be a forum that, in Wilson's words, would "keep this world fit to live in [by] exposing in public every crooked thing that is going on". The last war had been accidental; that had occurred, Sir Edward Grey wrote in 1919, "largely by default, because the forces of negotiation and peaceful settlement collapsed". The League would insure that there would be no similar collapse of these forces in the future. Secondly, if talks failed, the League would use economic or military, to compel the aggressor state to desist. The first intention was accepted "heart and soul"; the second was adamantly rejected. He did so not merely because he feared involvement in a far war but also because the United States refused to join the League, giving rise to profound fears that the Americans might frustrate, and even oppose, the operation of sanctions. Imagine a situation where Canada supported economic or military sanctions that the Americans fundamentally opposed. Mackenzie King could neither could most Canadians at the time.

Even Lester Pearson, whose instincts led so naturally towards support for the League, abandoned collective security for the League after 1935 — first in favour of isolationism, later in support of British initiatives and the general use of national policy and diplomacy to prevent war. In those perilous times, collective security rather than guaranteeing peace, seemed many a possible cause for general war. Is it correct to claim, as Veatch does, that after 1935, "King had simply opposed any attempt to avert war, or to influence the course of international events"? In a recent work, Corelli Barnett has argued that King's influence on British policy was decisive, albeit negative in result. Moreover, Norman Hillmer, in his excellent thesis on Anglo-Canadian relations, draws extensively on the King diary as a source. Veatch seems not to have consulted it. He makes a strong case that King tried energetically to influence international events to maintain peace. King may have exercised this influence badly and without success, but that is very different from stating that he made no attempt at all.

This study, therefore, falls short of fulfilling the publisher's hope that it "serve as the standard work on the League of Canada's first steps on the formal international stage". *Canada and the League*