

March 1946, when a bill was introduced to repeal the section of the act of 1912 which provided that the Prime Minister was to be the Secretary of State for External Affairs. The bill was passed on April 2 and five months later, on September 4, 1946, the announcement was made of the appointment of Mr. Louis St. Laurent as the first separate Secretary of State for External Affairs.

Early Years

The Department began with a modest staff consisting of the Under-Secretary (Joseph Pope), two chief clerks and four clerks. In 1912 an Assistant Under-Secretary was added, and in 1913 a Legal Adviser.

The gradual recognition of Canadian autonomy in international affairs and the growth of Canadian responsibilities abroad made expansion inevitable. After 1920, it became increasingly apparent that Canada's interests could no longer be conveniently handled by the British diplomatic and consular authorities. The new Department began to develop into an agency for the direct administration of Canada's external affairs.

In 1921, the Office of the High Commissioner in London was placed under the control of the Department. In 1925, a Canadian Advisory Officer (subsequently called Permanent Representative) was appointed in Geneva to represent Canada at various conferences and League Assemblies and to keep the Canadian Government informed of the activities of the League of Nations and of the International Labour Office.

An advance of the first importance in the Department's development came as the result of an agreement reached at the Imperial Conference of 1926, by which the Governor General ceased to represent the British Government and became solely the personal representative of the Sovereign. This brought about two changes: (1) as the British Government was now without a representative in Canada, it appointed, in 1928, a High Commissioner to represent it at Ottawa; (2) after July 1, 1927, correspondence from the Dominions Office in London and from foreign governments was directed to the Secretary of State for External Affairs instead of to the Governor General.

Representation Abroad

Before the establishment of the Department, a High Commissioner had been appointed to represent Canada in London (from 1880) and an Agent General in France (from 1882), neither of whom had diplomatic status. In addition, Canada was represented abroad in the closing years of the nineteenth century by trade commissioners and immigration officials. They were appointees of individual departments of the Canadian Government and did not enjoy diplomatic status. Negotiations with foreign countries were conducted through the British Foreign Office and dealings with other parts of the Empire through the Colonial Office, with Canadian representatives frequently included in negotiations. Canadian interests abroad were handled by British diplomatic and consular authorities. All communications to other governments were made through the Governor General in those early years.