



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
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No. 54/31 "SOME THOUGHTS ON CANADIAN EXTERNAL RELATIONS"

Text of an address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. L. B. Pearson, before the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Friday, June 4, 1954.

Canada's development in the last two decades has been almost as striking in her external relations as in domestic progress. If we compare our foreign policy with that of the mid-1930's there are certain particulars - and they are by no means minor ones - in which the changes will appear so dramatic as to amount almost to a complete reversal. For example, it would not be wholly wide of the mark, though an over-simplification, to say that before World War II Canada often appeared to be seeking peace through a policy of avoiding commitments; whereas during recent years we have been ready to assume them as the main element in our hope for security.

It is, I think, useful to consider to what extent we have, in fact, during the past few decades changed the fundamental principles underlying our foreign policy; and to what extent we have merely developed and adapted them to altered circumstances.

Early in 1937, Mr. Escott Reid, now our High Commissioner in New Delhi, but then National Secretary of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, analyzed in an article in the Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, Mr. Mackenzie King's foreign policy and summed it up in certain practices and principles.

He had this to say, first, about our practice in declaring policy:

"Since the war" (the 1914-18 war) "imprecision has been the common characteristic of most statements on foreign policy by Canadian Prime Ministers. In this the Prime Ministers of Canada have not been unique. As Mr. Harold Nicholson has pointed out, though 'the essence of a good foreign policy is certitude' and though 'an uncertain policy is always bad' yet 'on the other hand a parliamentary and press opposition is less likely to concentrate against an elastic foreign policy than against one which is precise. It is thus a grave temptation for a foreign minister under the democratic system to prefer an idealistic formula, which raises only intellectual criticism, to a concrete formula which is open to popular attack'."