

At 22, he was platoon commander with the 1st Battalion of the 48th Highlanders of Canada, rising to command the Essex Scottish Regiment from Caen in Normandy to Antwerp in Holland.

After the war he helped set up W. H. Smith's subsidiary in Toronto. He transferred to England in 1950 to become managing director of the parent company.

Taking charge of retail operations, Bennett gradually moved the cosy family company away from its monolithic base of newspaper distribution, dropping the occasional clanger in the process. A move into machine tools, for instance, proved abortive.

The W.H. Smith operation, so familiar to travellers today, started way back in 1792 when Henry Walton Smith and his wife Anna opened a small news agency near Grosvenor Square in London. In the early 1800s another of the Smiths, William Henry, built up a fleet of small carts and fast horses to carry news to country readers within 48 hours. The coming of the railway to the London area in 1848 gave the family firm a big impetus, and Smith's made the most of it, supplying not only books and newspapers to beguile the train journey but candles to read by and rugs to keep passengers warm. Halfway through the nineteenth century, Smith's had 550 bookstalls across the country.

Central buying

The second W. H. Smith was Leader of the House of Commons under Benjamin Disraeli and First Lord of the Admiralty, immortalised by Gilbert and Sullivan in the song about "the ruler of the Queen's Nay-vee."

As the new boss of the bookstall empire, Bennett has introduced central buying for a broad range of merchandise. Above all he's an exponent of what he calls "participative planning," a project whereby all employees are handed a form and asked to fill it in anonymously, listing the company's plus and minus points and making proposals for changes. These are forwarded to one of 18 six-member planning teams for processing into an "action plan."

"No matter how silly the suggestion, the idea must not be destroyed," says Bennett. "A place must be found for it somewhere."

International Management, a business magazine which studied Bennett's operation, commented that the method enables all staff to feel they are involved in the company's plans, as well as having an outlet to express grievances to senior management without fear of reprisal.

"An employee feels better when he has written his ideas down on paper," says Bennett. "It's a great emotional release."

Asked about the company's reputation for being somewhat prissy and conservative, Bennett merely smiles. "It was a great advantage being a Canadian," he says. "They thought I was crazy anyhow."

Economic Digest

Trudeau promises growth

Prime Minister Trudeau went on Canadian television in July to announce that the Government would be taking "much bolder action" to ensure the country's continued prosperity and re-affirm its unity.

Previous Government measures had laid a solid foundation for continuing progress but he had come to the conclusion that "we must have a major re-ordering of Government priorities. We must reduce the size of government and use the resources to sustain growth," he said.

A series of new initiatives would be announced in the near future, he added pledging to stimulate the economy, reduce unemployment, stimulate new investments in manufacturing, energy and resources, and help those, especially the elderly, who are hurt by inflation.

He said the new programme would be financed "by cutting from within, by using only saved resources to stimulate the economy."

Mr. Trudeau went on to announce that two billion dollars would be cut from current and planned expenditures and that there would be no growth in the federal public service. The rule of the government would be — deliver more for less.

He said the Government would be "very tough" in public sector negotiations and promised to remove "the intrusions of many government policies and regulations from individuals and businesses." In some cases this would mean returning functions to the private sector.

The Prime Minister announced at the same time that the Post Office would become a Crown Corporation, "free from many of the constraints of a Government department."

Higher profits forecast

Labour costs in Canada are being kept under control and as a result company profits should continue to increase, reported the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in July.

In an annual economic survey of Canada it said that on present indications, the next twelve months were likely to see some further improvement in cost and external trade performance and some recovery in domestic demand.

"Helped by indirect tax cuts, the inflation rate should come down in 1978 and a further substantial improvement in the country's labour cost position seems likely despite the fact that direct price and wage controls are being phased out," said the survey.

After a marked decline in 1975, Canada had been fortunate in experiencing the fastest growth rate of foreign markets in the 24-country OECD area, so helping to sustain exports and easing the burden of adjustment.

Devoting a major section to Canada's employment situation, the report said Canada had also experienced the fastest growth in employment throughout the OECD area in the last ten years. Despite this, it had registered one of the highest unemployment rates, which to a large extent reflected the rapid growth of the work force because of demographic factors. Shifts in demand and output structure which had led to a marked increase in female participation in the work force also contributed.

Trade surplus declines

In the second quarter of this year, Canada had a trade surplus of C\$391 million compared with C\$1.46 billion in the first three months. Although exports and imports were both higher in the second quarter, reported Statistics Canada, exports rose only marginally to C\$12.59 billion while imports increased by ten per cent to C\$12.2 billion.

Exports to the United States were at a record level with increases in motor vehicles and parts, fish, fertilisers, chemicals, non-ferrous metals and machinery and equipment. But exports to overseas countries, except to Britain and Japan, dropped.

Imports from the US rose by nearly 14 per cent to a new record while imports from overseas increased by nearly four per cent. There were larger imports of food, some industrial materials, non-automotive equipment and consumer goods, but fewer imports of coffee, metals and crude oil.

Unemployment down

Canada's unemployment rate dropped slightly in July for the first time in four months, Statistics Canada reports. The seasonally-adjusted rate was 8.4 per cent compared with 8.6 per cent in the four preceding months. The actual number of jobless was 927,000.

The unemployment rate among young people aged 15 to 24 improved slightly — down to 14.2 per cent — and the total number of people with jobs increased to 10.64 million. This represents an increase of 422,000 in the number working in the last year.

The jobless rate in July fell in six provinces and rose in the remaining four. The province-by-province rates were as follows with the June figure in brackets:— British Columbia, 7.7 per cent (7.8 per cent); Newfoundland, 16.7 per cent (17.3 per cent); Ontario, 7.3 per cent (7.4 per cent); Prince Edward Island, 9.1 per cent (9.7 per cent); Quebec, 10.5 per cent (11.4 per cent); Saskatchewan, 3.9 per cent (5 per cent); Alberta, 4.8 per cent (4.7 per cent); Manitoba, 6.7 per cent (6.6 per cent); New Brunswick, 12.9 per cent (11.6 per cent); Nova Scotia, 10.9 per cent (10.7 per cent).