

was the British influence, and a majority influence in Canada reacted against that influence just because a small country always tends to react against a bigger country which attempts to exert any influence over it. That influence was present as anyone who has read the letters of Laurier or the Memoirs of Sir Robert Borden can testify. Canada had, in those days, already won its autonomy in actual fact, but political controversy always lives on after the basic realities which began it have died; and the fight over Dominion status -- in my lifetime -- was a fight already won. It was -- if I may inject a note on another key -- the political merit of Mackenzie King to associate himself with that majority movement. It was the mistake of his opponents to associate themselves with an idea, sound enough in itself, in certain circumstances, which could be made to look like a refusal to accept facts as they were.

Yet that would not have been possible, had it not been for the fact that the United States, always the most pervasive and penetrating influence on Canadian life, had come to the considered conclusion that it wanted to isolate itself from the rest of the world, and sought fairly steadily to find ways of not asserting the power it obviously possessed. It left western leadership pretty well in the hands of the British who had maintained and asserted it for more than a century, and contented itself with twisting the lion's tail at intervals. The Canadians, in a mild and unassertive sort of way, built themselves up by following suit. We asserted ourselves against British leadership, and because opinion on this count was not a unanimous opinion, we seriously divided ourselves in so doing. Of course, it can be argued, and well argued, that had we not done so, our internal divisions might well have been more serious than they were. But pursuit of this point would be the raking over of coals now not so hot, and I don't want to do it.

The major outline is, I think, fairly sound. That our policy of asserting and re-asserting our autonomy after the first great war, was basically the reaction of a small power against a big power which held leadership in its hands. It was not, basically, a quarrel based on either British or anti-British grounds, though these were the terms which were often used. It was much more, a controversy between one section of Canadians who believed the time had come to stand on our own feet, and to resist outside pressures; and another section which believed that this was premature, that Canada had no proper means of coming to its own conclusions, and that, in these circumstances, the course of wisdom was in large measure to accept British leadership and judgment in matters where our own experience was limited. But that position did not rule out at any time the taking of an independent stand, as was shown by Mr. Arthur Meighen, one of this club's most distinguished members, when the time came in 1921 to decide whether or not to renew the Anglo-Japanese alliance.

Now, if that brief analysis has any merit, let us turn to the situation which now confronts Canada, and see whether the basic proposition is strong enough to stand up to the new set of circumstances confronting us. That proposition, let me repeat, is that it is likely to be Canada's fate to develop a foreign policy which