



*Their Majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visit Ottawa.*



### **CANADA AND THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS**

Canada is a self-governing nation enjoying political independence. This independence has been achieved by a gradual process of evolution, from colonial status in the mid-nineteenth century to complete sovereignty in the twentieth, with the full concurrence and encouragement of the British government at every stage. Canada to-day formulates her own policies, negotiates and signs her own treaties, accredits her own diplomats and settles in her own right the issues of peace or war.

As a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations, Canada is one of a group of autonomous nations including the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and the Union of South Africa, which are equal in status and united by a common allegiance to the Crown. The Commonwealth was an outgrowth of World War I, during which Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa developed rapidly under their

new responsibilities and emerged as independent powers. Their new status was recognized at the end of the war when they were accorded the right of separate representation at the peace conference and individual membership in the League of Nations. Their relationship to the United Kingdom and to each other was defined in 1926 and given legal form in the Statute of Westminster, 1931.

The ties which hold the nations of the Commonwealth together are ties of sentiment and common interest. Besides their allegiance to the Crown they share a heritage of British traditions and concepts of individual freedom, and use British forms of government and law.

Continuous consultation is maintained between them on matters of common concern, including all important developments in their international relations. The member nations have High Commissioners stationed in one another's capitals, who keep in constant touch with the governments to which they are appointed. Imperial Conferences are held every four years or oftener, in which the Prime Ministers discuss matters of general policy. In addition, the Prime Ministers frequently communicate directly with one another on pressing current matters.

During World War II cooperation was particularly close. There was a constant exchange of officials, cabinet ministers and special missions between the member nations. Special machinery for placing British war orders in Canada was set up at the outbreak of war. Manufacture and control of supplies were planned together. The most conspicuous example of military cooperation was the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan which brought airmen from all over the Commonwealth to be trained in Canada. Since the end of the war consultation has continued on a wide range of subjects.

Economic interests form a strong link. Canada's trade with British countries is of great importance to her. The United Kingdom was until recent years the largest single buyer of Canadian goods. That place has now been taken by the United States, but the Commonwealth countries and British possessions still buy almost half of Canada's exports.

That this free association of British nations is not in any sense an exclusive bloc was emphasized by the Canadian Prime Minister, W. L. Mackenzie King, in his address to the British Houses of Parliament in 1944.

"If", Mr. King said, "the strength and unity of the Commonwealth are to be maintained, those ends will be achieved not by policies which are exclusive, but by policies which can be shared with other nations. I am firmly convinced that the way to maintain our unity is to base that unity upon principles which can be extended to all nations."

In her dual role of North American nation and member of the Commonwealth, Canada has a contribution to make towards international understanding that is out of all proportion to her size and individual importance. Cooperation between the British Commonwealth of Nations and the United States is essential to Canada and no less essential to world peace. A primary aim of Canadian policy is to contribute, wherever possible, to continued cordial relations between them.

