

Canadians as Internationalists

During the post-war decades, Canada and Canadians acquired a certain taste and talent for international activities of various kinds. Canadians took pride in the skill with which their political leaders, their military and civilian peacekeepers, their trade and other negotiators conducted the nation's business abroad. The international reputation Canada had then was earned at a time when Canada enjoyed a preferred position and a wide range of opportunities, as one of the few developed countries that had emerged from the Second World War materially unscathed and indeed politically, militarily and economically stronger than ever. It was a position that was bound to be affected by changes in the world power structure resulting from the post-war rehabilitation of larger countries, including friends and former enemies. The Canadian people had broken out of the isolationism of the thirties and come to the realization that there was an interesting and important world outside where Canada should have a distinctive contribution to make. Canadians developed and exercised a substantial interest in international organizations. They moved in ever-growing numbers into the less-developed parts of the world as technicians, teachers and administrators; they encouraged and accepted foreign scholars, students and trainees to enter Canadian institutions of education; Canadians travelled far and wide in search of business, service and pleasure. The emergence of former colonies as free nations offered new challenges to religious groups, private aid societies, universities, humanitarian groups generally.

This varied activity by Canadians has stimulated and substantiated a deep-seated desire in this country to make a distinctive contribution to human betterment. It manifests itself in the various pressures which have been exerted on successive Governments to do more in such international fields as peacekeeping, development aid and cultural cross-fertilization. This altruistic aspiration seems to be shared generally across Canada. What Canada can hope to accomplish in the world must be viewed not only in the light of Canadian aspirations, needs and wants but in terms of what is, from time to time, attainable.

The Changing World

From the outset of this policy review it was apparent that some of the safe assumptions of the post-war decades were crumbling away as the world changed: