

CANADIAN INTEREST IN THE PAN AMERICAN MOVEMENT

The Canadian attitude towards the Pan American movement has changed radically in the last five years. Before the Second World War there were few Canadians outside of academic and political circles who showed any interest in the movement. If Canadians thought about it at all, they were apt to associate it with ideas of United States dominance in Latin America. There was little disposition to join a Union which, in the minds of many, seemed to be little more than an adjunct of the United States State Department. The Latin American countries, moreover, seemed to be very far away indeed; and Canada had few contacts with them, either economic or cultural.

Even more important, perhaps, was the fact that Canada had only recently achieved international status. She was a member of the League of Nations and certain other international organizations; but in the conduct of her foreign relations she usually followed the leadership of Great Britain who also represented her interests in foreign countries until, in 1927, Canada began to send her own diplomatic missions abroad.

Canada had little interest in the Western Hemisphere apart from the United States. Notwithstanding her preoccupation with domestic problems, she was in no sense isolationist; but in international affairs her thoughts were directed towards Europe rather than towards the Western Hemisphere.

In the summer of 1940, this attitude of indifference towards the Pan American movement suddenly changed. German successes in the Low Countries and the capitulation of France forced Canadians to contemplate the possibility of an attack on their shores by an overseas power. In Canada, as in the other countries of the Americas, people began to think in terms of hemisphere defence.

Reference has already been made to the preoccupations of the American foreign ministers at the Havana Consultative Meeting in July. Canada was not represented at that meeting; but there is reason to believe that Canada's strategic position as part of any hemisphere defence system was not ignored. One thing is certain - slightly over two weeks after the Havana Meeting, Canada entered into a defence arrangement with the United States by which it was agreed that the two countries would set up a Permanent Joint Board of Defence one of the duties of which was to be to "consider in the broad sense the defence of the north half of the Western Hemisphere." By the Ogdensburg Pact Canada not only put her relationships with the United States on an entirely new basis, she recognized for the first time that she had interests that extended to at least the equator.

At the same time that she discovered that she had an interest in hemisphere defence, Canada also discovered that she had increasingly important economic interests in Latin America. For one thing, Canada was in need of United States dollars. Some of these dollars might be obtained by selling more Canadian goods in an area where dollars were still to be had. There was also the necessity of finding new sources for strategic materials that could no longer be obtained from traditional sources; and Canadian exporters were looking for markets to replace those that had been lost in Nazi-dominated Europe.

It was in these circumstances that in November, 1940, the MacKinnon Trade Mission set out on a tour of the southern part of the hemisphere. This particular venture had to be abandoned when the Minister fell ill in Panama; but in August, 1941, the interrupted tour was continued.