



Statements and Speeches

No. 83/10

FOREIGN POLICY AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Address by de Montigny Marchand, Deputy Minister (Foreign Policy), Department of External Affairs, to the fiftieth Annual Study Conference of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs (CIIA), Ottawa, May 7, 1983.

Anniversaries are invariably peculiar events. They may make us confident of what we have achieved in the past — or punctuate a determination to do things differently in the future. But always, I think, a little nostalgia is in order: a look back over our shoulder at where we started; a reassuring tug at our roots.

The surprise, very often, is that things really haven't changed very much. Our reaction, particularly in the field of foreign policy, is frequently not amazement at the fact of change, but astonishment that so much has stayed the same.

I draw this homily from a review of the first annual CIIA Study Conference, held in Montreal from May 19-20, 1934.

That conference, in addition to dinner at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, offered two round table discussions: the first on Canadian social and economic policy, reported by K.W. Taylor, and the second on the collective system of security and Canada's place in it, reported by F.R. Scott.

Taylor's account of the economic discussion reviews, in terms familiar today, the vulnerability of our resource trade and commodity markets, the burden of maintaining a coast-to-coast infrastructure, and the high cost of government services.

F.R. Scott's round table on collective security was equally prescient. In discussing the hazards of isolationism for Canada, he reports what we can construe as a very early version of the Third Option.

I quote "... an attempt at isolation will necessitate our quitting the Commonwealth, and this will merely bring us more than ever within the sphere of American imperialism".

Thus we see our predecessors, of 50 years ago, up against the same hard realities which animate our internationalist approach today. The logic which led them to conclude that Canada had no choice but to work for a collective security system was different then. Their conclusion, and our own, are the same.

We may have over-achieved with regard to another recommendation which emerged at that session about the parliamentary side of our organization. Scott writes that "one needed development is the appointment of a full-time minister as head of the Department of External Affairs". Today, of course, we have three ministers, all very much full-time.