

Let us now examine the evolution of our relations with Latin America since 1945.

Canada's Geopolitical Situation

From the point of view of our geopolitical situation, one would assume, at first glance, that Canada would have long since drawn closer to the countries of Latin America. In fact, we share the American continent with these countries; in principle. Canada and the Latin American countries defend the same political ideals -- that is, those expressed in the Charter of the OAS. Nevertheless, up to the present time, geopolitical forces have had the reverse effect.

Paradoxically, the main reason for this state of affairs is the special geographic position of the United States. The latter country is obviously the dominating geopolitical force in this Hemisphere and its influence is felt both to the north and to the south. Yet its relations with these two regions have developed separately, and in different directions. Similarly, both of these regions have a special relation with the United States, but this relation binds the region concerned to the United States rather than to the region at the other extremity of the Hemisphere. For this reason, one can say that the United States has been a geographical entity -- one might almost say a geopolitical entity -- separating Canada from Latin America.

I should add, in passing, that, if one considers the political systems of Canada and Latin America, the difference which does, in fact, exist between our system and that of most Latin American countries has been an element of neutrality in the development of our relations with these countries. In general, we have adopted the most correct and, perhaps, the easiest attitude, the attitude that their choice of systems of government is entirely their own affair, and they have granted us the same consideration. Perhaps this has not drawn us any closer to these countries but, up to the present, it has not separated us from them either.

There is another major reason why geopolitical forces have not yet brought Canada and Latin America much closer together: in the past, the political interests of Canada and those of Latin American countries did not follow the same line. Since their liberation a century and a half ago, the countries of Latin America have maintained cultural links with Spain and Portugal, and European immigration has played an important role in their development. Nevertheless, these countries have been forced to center their preoccupations on the solution of their internal problems and the affairs of the Hemisphere. As I shall mention later, the Canadian people's involvement in international affairs is a fairly recent phenomenon. Despite this, Canada has always been relatively open to the outside world, either for historical or internal reasons, or because of the need to counterbalance the influence of the United States.

As a result of technological changes since the Second World War, the geopolitical gap between Canada and Latin America has narrowed. Aviation and telecommunications have greatly facilitated contacts between the various parts of the Western Hemisphere, and between this Hemisphere and the rest of the world. Canadians are showing a greater interest in the affairs of this Hemisphere than they did in the past; at the same time, the people of Latin