

## INTRODUCTION

The year covered in this volume was one of change in leadership, and to some extent also in direction, for the Government of Canada and for its Department of External Affairs. In late January 1948, William Lyon Mackenzie King announced his decision to retire as Prime Minister. Sixteen months earlier, he had relinquished the portfolio of Secretary of State for External Affairs, but neither that change nor the announcement of his retirement ended his interest or involvement in the development and implementation of Canada's foreign policy. There is ample evidence of that impact in this collection of documents, which necessarily includes extracts from the Prime Minister's diary to fill important gaps in one major story, what Robert Cuff and J.L. Granatstein called 'The Rise and Fall of Canadian-American Free Trade.'<sup>1</sup> As well, there were many other instances when Mackenzie King's intervention proved decisive or when his influence prompted a reconsideration of policy. Even so, his formal declaration that he would leave the office of Prime Minister before the end of the year anticipated the end of an era.

In August 1948, Louis S. St. Laurent, who had succeeded King as Secretary of State for External Affairs two years earlier, won the leadership of the Liberal Party, though he did not immediately take over as Prime Minister. Not until after Mackenzie King returned from the meetings of the United Nations General Assembly in Paris and the Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth in London (which he was unable to attend for reasons of health) did St. Laurent finally assume the mantle of Prime Minister on 15 November 1948. By then, Lester B. Pearson, who had served for two years as Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, had made the transition to politics, about which he had hinted to Norman Robertson at the beginning of June.<sup>2</sup> On 10 September 1948, Pearson became Secretary of State for External Affairs. From then until the end of the year, Pearson was more often away from Ottawa, first to fight a by-election in Algoma East, then to represent Canada at meetings in Paris and London.

As a consequence, the political direction of the Department of External Affairs was for a considerable time in the hands of an acting minister, the Minister of National Defence, Brooke Claxton. The principal official advising him throughout the autumn was Escott Reid, who had assumed responsibility as Acting Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs the day after Pearson's appointment as Minister. Meanwhile, the search for a permanent successor to Pearson became entangled with an earlier effort to find a senior francophone official to replace Laurent Beaudry, who had been forced to resign as Associate Under-Secretary for reasons of health. Efforts to maintain a francophone presence in the highest ranks of the Department failed when first Pierre Dupuy declined the position of Deputy Under-Secretary and later Jean Désy resisted Pearson's entreaties to succeed him as Under-Secretary. By then, Pearson had already approached the Clerk of the Privy Council, Arnold Heeney, about the latter position. That particular sub-plot was not

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Cuff and J.L. Granatstein, 'The Rise and Fall of Canadian-American Free Trade, 1947-8,' *Canadian Historical Review* 57 (December 1977), 459ff. See also J.L. Granatstein *How Britain's Weakness Forced Canada into the Arms of the United States* (Toronto, 1989), chapter 3. C.P. Stacey argued that this episode was an effective demonstration of the power of the Prime Minister. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict*, Volume 2: 1921-1948 (Toronto, 1981), p. 424.

<sup>2</sup>Pearson Papers/Vol.13: L.B. Pearson to N.A. Robertson, 1 June 1948.