

CHAPTER 6

CANADA AND THE UNITED NATIONS

I - Introduction

The resolution passed by the House of Commons on March 28, 1945, approving Canada's acceptance of the invitation to attend the San Francisco Conference contained these words: "The establishment of an effective international organization for the maintenance of international peace and security is of vital importance to Canada...and it is in the interests of Canada that Canada should become a member of such an organization". With its approval of this resolution by an overwhelming majority, Parliament provided tangible evidence of Canada's desire to see drawn up what Mr. King termed at the San Francisco Conference "a charter of world security" in which Canadians could place their trust and hopes for peace in order that the horrors, sacrifices and destruction of another world war might be avoided.

2. Underlying this resolution were factors which served to explain why Canada's best hope for permanent security was thought to lie in the development of a firm structure of international organization in which all nations pledged themselves to meet collectively any threat to the security of any one nation or group of nations. Some of these factors were not new in the sense that they had also determined Canada's desire to become a member of, and to give support to the League of Nations but the nature of the post-war world gave these factors a greater degree of urgency and importance. Others stemmed directly from Canada's war effort, which she considered entitled her to a voice in the conduct of post-war affairs and from her proven willingness as a responsible nation to fulfil international obligations. Taken together, these factors grouped themselves into two principal ones. In the first place there was a growing realization that as a result of their participation in two world wars Canadians could no longer remain unaffected by a development in any part of the world likely to threaten the peace. In an interdependent age of atomic weapons, guided missiles and long-range aircraft no nation could seriously consider isolating itself from the rest of the world, nor could any nation hope to withstand any threat to its security by means of its own resources. Secondly, as a middle power, Canada could make a more effective contribution to the preservation of peace as a member of a world organization such as the United Nations where her less substantial material and military resources (compared to those of Great Power) could to some extent be made up for, provided her actions were characterized by a high degree of responsibility and supported by a willingness to meet her obligations as fully as possible when called upon to do so. Not only could the United Nations supply that additional measure of security to a middle power which the Great Powers did not require to the same degree or extent but the potential contribution which a middle power such as Canada could make to the work of the United Nations would redound to the benefit of the organizations as well. This factor was clearly in Mr. King's mind at San Francisco when he pleaded for a greater measure of responsibility to be accorded the lesser powers. Although, he said, Canada recognized that primary responsibility must lie with the "Big Five", power should not exclusively be concentrated in their hands for "experience has shown that the contribution of smaller powers is not a negligible one either to the preservation of peace or to its restoration when peace has been disturbed". The alternative was what Mr. King called "the development of a new type of isolationism, a feeling that the task of preserving the peace could be left exclusively to Great Powers".