

INTRODUCTION

Volume 24 in the *Documents on Canadian External Relations* series is the first of two covering the period from 10 June 1957 to 31 December 1958 following the election of John G. Diefenbaker's minority Progressive Conservative government. This volume contains documents detailing Canada's involvement in the affairs of the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the Commonwealth. It also contains chapters on Western Europe and atomic energy. The succeeding volume will document Canada's relations with the United States, the Middle East, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the Far East, and Latin America.

The Conservative election victory in 1957 guaranteed that Commonwealth affairs would be granted a higher priority than they had enjoyed under previous Liberal governments. As the extensive documentation in Chapter Three reveals, however, this shift in emphasis did not always lead in productive directions. Prime Minister Diefenbaker travelled to the London meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers determined to gather support for a Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference—the first since 1952. Although the response to this proposal was lukewarm, Diefenbaker returned to Canada with the promise that a request for a meeting of Commonwealth Finance Ministers in Canada in September would be considered favourably. Arriving at Uplands Airport on 6 July 1957, Diefenbaker announced his intention to divert fifteen percent of Canada's import purchases from the United States to Britain, a proposal that dominated the ensuing efforts to convene the Finance Ministers' meeting.

Senior bureaucrats quickly advised Diefenbaker that a marked shift in preference for British goods would have "severe repercussions on exports and on Canada's general prosperity" [Document 345]. British officials, however, took up Diefenbaker's offer and raised the ante by proposing a free trade agreement between Canada and Britain, a politically motivated scheme that, if implemented, would have been disadvantageous to Canada [Document 351]. The British Minister of Agriculture, Derick Heathcote Amory, met with Diefenbaker and Finance Minister Donald Fleming on 9 September in Ottawa to press for a quick Canadian decision on a free trade plan, a tactic Wynne Plumpre, the assistant deputy minister of finance, described as "absolutely outrageous" [Document 354]. Detailed bilateral discussions among Cabinet ministers and senior officials [Documents 353 and 360] did transpire prior to and following the meeting of Commonwealth Finance Ministers held at Mont Tremblant, Quebec, from 28-30 September 1957, but no substantive agreement could be reached concerning measures to significantly boost the level of Anglo-Canadian trade.

Despite this bruising initiation into the arena of Commonwealth politics, the Diefenbaker Government received the necessary approval at Mont Tremblant to host a Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference in Montreal in September 1958. Senior officials realized from the outset that the Commonwealth itself "involved a clash between form and substance" [Document 364], but they undertook extensive preparations attempting to ensure the conference's success. On the eve of the conference, however, Cabinet members admitted that its prospects were "somewhat depressing" [Document 370], an assessment that proved to be largely correct in terms of substantive economic benefits for Canada. Nonetheless, important measures were adopted during the conference, including an agreement in principle to construct a