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Speech by the Hon. Paul Martin,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
at the Kent County Warden's Banquet,
St. Joseph's Auditorium, Chatham, Ontario,
on November 25, 1967, at 6:30 p.m.

"THE INDIVIDUAL AND CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY"

It is the undoubted responsibility of the government in a democratic society to provide leadership in the conception and implementation of foreign policy. This responsibility is an extension of the role played by the government in all areas of public policy.

But in a democracy, foreign policy cannot be the sole prerogative of government. The public - or to be more specific, the private citizen - has an integral part to play. As Mackenzie King once wrote "where there is little or no public opinion, there is likely to be bad government, which sooner or later becomes autocratic government."

Tonight I would like to discuss the role of the individual citizen in relation to government in the development and execution of Canadian foreign policy.

The Canadian public - both individually and collectively - is becoming increasingly knowledgeable and articulate. It was not always so. Even in the recent past, the interest of Canadians was limited, and where it did exist, was concentrated on one or two traditional issues which affected our citizens directly. In the period before World War II, for example, André Siegfried, the French observer of Canadian society could comment that "in so far as the Canadians are concerned, collective security (a major issue in the League of Nations) is only a conviction de luxe". There were opportunities for discussion but debate was desultory and detached. Canadians thought that they could afford to look at their country as a "fireproof house"; that they could call Europe disdainfully a "continent which could

not run itself"; that they could give their attention only to imperial and North American relations.

Has there been a change in public attitudes since 1945? The answer is clearly "yes" not only in the amount and extent of discussion but in the importance of foreign affairs to Canadians.

Why this dramatic change? There are many reasons: First of all we learned hard lessons in the Second World War about interdependence in a rapidly changing world. Second, having secured our status as an independent country in the inter-war period, we have been able to develop an independent foreign policy on global issues. Third - communications technology has exposed us to the views and problems of other countries around the world. Television in particular has given us an image of the world which we cannot ignore. The prospect, for example, of live coverage of war through satellite communications cannot help but affect Canadian attitudes toward international conflict. Fourth - (and I want to expand on this point) Canadians have become individually and in groups involved in the international process to an unprecedented extent. For example, expanding foreign trade has taken Canadians as buyers and sellers beyond traditional markets to deal with all parts of the world. The Canadian diplomatic service, which maintained seven posts abroad in 1939, now has more than 80. Other Government officials travel to establish contact with their counterparts in innumerable subjects of foreign policy. The arrival of immigrants in the hundreds of thousands annually has

created personal contacts with scores of countries. Post-war affluence has made Canadians/^{as tourists} among the most travelled people in the world - not just to the United States, which is close at hand, but to the four corners of the earth. And our aid programmes since 1950 have sent almost 4,000 Canadians to far away lands as teachers, experts or advisers. And finally Expo '67 has played a big part in putting Canadians in touch with "man and his world". In sum, this great number of personal contacts has laid the basis for wide public involvement in foreign affairs. Increasingly Canadians care about world problems as in the past they cared/^{only} about domestic problems.

This is natural development in a democracy. It is also in my view a necessary development.

The role of the individual in foreign policy is based on three factors:

First: it is the right of free citizens to express their views in a field which is as important to them personally as any domestic area. In fact, the relations between states encompass many of the activities of government at home such as trade, finance and cultural activities so that in some ways, foreign affairs represent an extension of the domestic scene.

Second: public opinion is an important potential check on and guide for government policy. History is replete with examples of public attitudes which subsequently proved closer to the mark than official policy.

Third: unless a reasonably large group of citizens without particular axes to grind, expresses concern about foreign policy issues, governments could be excessively

influenced by special interest groups whose approach is narrow.

Of course, a price is paid in a democracy for the involvement of the public in foreign policy - it is not, however, a high price given the importance of this involvement. The price is what James Reston, the American columnist, has described as playing an "open hand" in the poker game of international negotiation with authoritarian societies whose card hand is kept closed. Public debate at home can restrict the flexibility of negotiators in their discussions with other countries.

A point worth noting is that "wide interest" among the general public should not be interpreted as universal interest. Surveys in other democratic and developed countries have suggested that only about 25 per cent of the adult population sustains an interest in international issues. Even with education programmes, the percentages do not seem to have risen greatly. Thus it would be utopian to expect the entire population to be vitally interested and knowledgeable on foreign policy on a continuing basis. But this does not preclude deep concern on a particular issue at a particular time - for example - the war in Vietnam. In all probability, the poll taken across the country last summer which indicated that foreign policy topped the list of important problems for more Canadians than any other single issue, reflects the deeply-felt concern among large numbers of Canadians about the continuing conflict in Southeast Asia.

The Canadian Government has welcomed the surge of interest and participation by the citizens of the country in foreign affairs.

It is apparent, of course, that foreign affairs though related to many domestic issues, does involve concepts which are not totally analogous to their domestic counterparts. To understand and deal with these concepts some expertise is helpful. On the other hand, in Canada we have avoided the arrogance attributed in these words to the "experts" in another western country:

"(they) tend to build up a cult of expertness, an almost mystical cloud-throne guarded by the cherubim of a special technical language" (James Marshall, APSJ)

There are two points which I consider essential in the relationship between public and government: the first is that any citizen who has views on foreign policy should have an easy opportunity to discuss them publicly and to communicate them to the government. The second is that the government should ensure that the public is brought into its confidence, is provided with information and is given a chance to increase its knowledge about foreign affairs. I think that both these conditions are being met in Canada. In fact to quote an astute British observer of the international scene: "the problem of the modern foreign minister, seeking legislative and popular support, is often how to get people to absorb more information rather than to keep information from them." (Max Beloff). Thus, in an area such as foreign aid the government, having set out goals which we hope to reach in four or five years, is working to ensure that the country will be attuned to the needs of less developed countries and the opportunities for Canada in development and assistance.

Individuals affect Canada's foreign policy in two major ways. First, they participate in person-to-person or group-to-

group activities such as trade or tourism which in turn have implications for official policy. Second, the public influences government policy by the presentation of its views through personal discussion, the communications media, lobbying and other forms of demonstration. Although the precise effect of any of these major areas is usually difficult to establish with precision, there is no question in my mind that popular views on international matters are important factors in the evolution of government policy.

Without abdicating its responsibility to give a lead to the public, the Canadian government is not only aware of, but also responsive to, public opinion.

If public opinion is free and articulate, comment on government policy will be critical as well as commendatory. This is to be expected. Critical comment must be seriously studied and incorporated into the government's own review of foreign policy questions.

Let me give a specific Canadian example. We regularly re-examine our defence commitments to determine whether they serve Canada's national objectives. Partly as a result of a healthy questioning by some Canadians we have recently re-assessed with special care the grounds for participating in collective security arrangements. The conclusion which we have reached is that we should continue at the present time to make an appropriate contribution to collective defence arrangements in NATO. But the point which I want to emphasize is that the Government is alive to public concern about collective defense and is prepared to give special attention to the views of individual Canadians on this important subject.

Criticism should be responsible. I don't mean that punches should be pulled - only that critical comment should take into account:

- that foreign affairs are complex in the extreme;
- that the positions of other countries must be considered;
- that the effect of criticism should be constructive; and
- that one man's view deserves as much attention as his neighbours - but no more. Intolerance has no greater justification in public criticism than it has in government policy.

After four years as Secretary of State for External Affairs, I am convinced that the interplay of government and individual in the conduct of Canadian foreign policy has been constructive and, on the whole, harmonious. Our national debate on foreign affairs has led to the evolution of policies which have served the country's interests and reflected a broad consensus in all parts of Canada. I hope that the dialogue between the individual and the government in all the ways I have described will continue in the future - our free and democratic society depends on this dialogue no less in foreign affairs than in domestic affairs.