

# CANADA

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## THE STATUTE OF WESTMINSTER

Next year, Canada will celebrate a century and a quarter as a nation. However, in reality, this December marks the 60th anniversary of Canada's full sovereignty in international affairs. Confusing?

On 1 July 1867, Canada was created by the union of Upper Canada and Lower Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. This union gave the new nation dominion status, while remaining a colony of the British Empire. As a dominion, Canada had control of its internal affairs but not external relations. Canada's Constitution was the British North America Act, which had been drawn up by Canadians but enacted by the British Parliament.

### Dominion status

Although the government in Ottawa had wide powers for dealing with matters within its boundaries, there were other issues for which the approval of the British government was needed. Canada did not control its foreign relations and was not allowed to negotiate commercial treaties with other sovereign nations, which remained ultimately the responsibility of the British government.

Canada was not alone in having this or similar status within the British Empire; Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Ireland, and Newfoundland all eventually became dominions. As these nations matured, they began to seek powers greater than those of colonies.

By 1926, it was obvious a new definition of the relationship between Britain and its former colonies was needed. At the Imperial Conference of 1926 a formula for the emerging independence of the Dominions was agreed to. British cabinet minister and former prime minister, Lord Balfour chaired a committee that had been given the task of looking into the changing relationship. He concluded that the best approach was to allow Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Ireland, and Newfoundland to mature into full nationhood. They would form the nucleus of a "British Commonwealth of Nations." Lord Balfour's Report put it this way:

"They are autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations." Adding that, "Every self-governing member of the Empire is now the master of its destiny."

The Balfour Report became the basis of the Statute of Westminster which marked the coming of age for Canada and the other Dominions. The Statute itself gave constitutional recognition to what had become practice over the years. However, Canada still lacked a complete foreign service, so independence in foreign relations grew as such a service developed.

Canada's independent status came at a time of great difficulty at home. The Great Depression, which lasted throughout the 1930s, cast a shadow over all other concerns. With the concentration on trying to cope with the social and economic hardships of the Depression, the affairs of the rest of the world had to come second.

So, Canada, in common with many other nations, followed foreign policy goals that served its interest at home. The nation's destiny was strongly, though not exclusively, tied to developments in North America, so overseas commitments were avoided as unnecessary complications. As Canada also had a close relationship with Britain, it was essential that harmony existed within the North Atlantic triangle. Also, as a trading nation, Canada did not want to get involved in alliances that might upset its customers or impede the flow of trade.

### Canada and the League of Nations

Canada's wish to isolate itself from foreign commitments showed up at the League of Nations. The League, a forerunner of the United Nations, was an attempt by world powers to resolve international problems before they escalated into fighting. However, the League was weakened, especially from Canada's point of view, because the United States had decided not to join. Canada had joined the League of Nations at its founding in 1919, and having membership

in its own right was seen as a mark of the country's growing independence.

A test of the League's effectiveness came in 1931. Japan invaded the Chinese province of Manchuria. The League of Nations, and Canada supported the decision, failed to defend China; Japan's aggression went unchallenged. The League and its members did not want to get tangled up in distant conflicts; they preferred to try to isolate themselves from any such adventures.

Four years later, the issue of one nation attacking another came up again: Italy, under the leadership of the dictator Benito Mussolini, invaded Ethiopia, which shared an ill-defined frontier with an Italian colony in East Africa. The League of Nations condemned Italy's aggression and brought in economic sanctions. League members were forbidden to trade with Italy in certain goods. However, coal, steel, and oil were not on the list of banned goods, and Italy's invasion would have collapsed without oil. Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King summed up Canada's view of the somewhat half-hearted sanctions by saying that it was not Canada's job to "regulate a European War."

The prime minister was speaking as much to the audience at home as the international community. King was well aware of the unity problems within Canada that had been caused by involvement in foreign wars before. During the Boer War (1899-1902) the country had been split on sending soldiers to help Britain in its fight against the Afrikaners of South Africa. English Canada supported sending Canadian soldiers, French Canada was adamantly opposed. The same division appeared over whether or not to conscript soldiers to fight in the trenches of The First World War. The conscription crisis of 1917 almost tore the country apart. Prime Minister King did not want to see the country so seriously divided over another foreign involvement.

This same attitude prevailed in the years before The Second World War. Canada, along with other nations, believed that the best way to deal with Germany's Nazi leader Adolf Hitler was to make concessions to avoid an open conflict with him. When Hitler reoccupied the Rhineland, which had been lost to Germany after The First World War, the rest of the world did nothing. Then, Hitler took over Austria; again, the world stood by and watched. Next, in September 1938, came the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia. The leaders of France, Britain, Germany, and Italy agreed, in Munich, that Hitler should be allowed to annex the Sudetenland as it was the home of many ethnic Germans. Canada was very supportive of the Munich agreement believing that Hitler only wished to unite Europe's German-speaking people.

When Hitler conquered the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, the world realized his ambitions were not limited to reuniting the German people. Britain and France then offered to guarantee the sovereignty of other German neighbours. In September 1939, Hitler attacked Poland, triggering The Second World War.

Prime Minister King called Parliament into session and a declaration of war was passed. Canada, as a sovereign nation, was at war with Nazi Germany.

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## Canada at war

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King's pre-war policy of avoiding foreign entanglements that might threaten national unity had helped to heal the wounds that had been opened by the conscription issue of The First World War. Now, the Prime Minister faced another threat to stability in Canada. At the start of the war he promised there would be no conscription of soldiers to fight overseas. But would the Prime Minister be able to avoid conscription if the war dragged on for several years?

As it turned out, King had little time for reflection on the issue. The government of Maurice Duplessis in Quebec called a snap election in October 1939, within a month of the declaration of war. Ottawa, Duplessis claimed, was using the war as an excuse to grab power and to weaken Quebec's sovereignty. That challenge to the wartime authority of the federal government became the focus of the provincial election campaign.

Ernest Lapointe, the prime minister's Quebec lieutenant, and three other cabinet ministers from Quebec entered the election campaign. They repeated their promise that no one would be conscripted to fight overseas. To elect Duplessis, Lapointe and his colleagues contended, would undermine their authority to speak for Quebec. So they threatened to resign if Duplessis won, which would have removed all Quebec representation from the federal cabinet.

The tactics worked and Maurice Duplessis' government was defeated at the polls. But the conscription issue would not go away. By 1942, the need for more fighting men forced King to call for a national vote asking the people of Canada to release him and his government from their repeated promises not to bring in full conscription. In the plebiscite, English Canada overwhelmingly supported conscription. However, less than a third of Quebecers were in favour. Still, King was able to avoid the final issue until 1944. Losses in Europe made it imperative that conscripts be sent to make up the numbers. The Prime Minister ordered overseas 16,000 men who had been conscripted for duty in Canada only.

The outcry was nothing like the one that followed conscription in 1917. King had resisted drafting men overseas as long as possible and this was appreciated in French Canada. National unity had been bruised by the issue but not broken.

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## Canada in a world of superpowers

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The experience of The Second World War made it clear that no nation could stand outside the world community. Even if it took no part in making decisions it would be affected by them. The best course for Canada was to try to influence world decisions, as far as it was possible for a middle power to do.

During the war, Canada gained both experience and prestige as a result of its contribution to allied victory. Officials made contacts with the country's

allies in war through a greatly expanded Department of External Affairs. (From 1912 to 1946, prime ministers had also headed that ministry. In 1946, King appointed Louis St. Laurent as Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs.) This experience was now put to use in shaping a new world organization that would be given the task of preserving the peace among nations. Canada played a significant role in the setting up of the United Nations, and became a principal member in UN agencies such as the World Food Board and the Atomic Energy Commission.

But, Canada, as with all other nations, had to adjust to the post-war reality of a world dominated by two major powers — the Soviet Union and the United States. Geography placed Canada between the two giants, and friendship closely linked the country to the United States in defence of North America. So, Canada took a leading part in forming the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This built on the old alliance of Britain, Canada, and the United States by adding most of the nations of Western Europe. Each country pledged to come to the defence of the others if they were attacked.

By now, there was strong support across Canada for these international involvements. The foreign policy of the Cold War period acted as a unifying force within the country.

Now closer than ever to the United States, Canada had to find ways of preserving its own identity in world affairs. It had to make it plain to Washington that Canada, while a staunch ally, could not be taken for granted. The interests of Canada and the United States were similar, not identical.

In the United Nations, Canada's efforts were directed at mediation and compromise; and, Canada did not always follow the American line on issues. Through the Commonwealth of Nations, Canada maintained ties with Britain's former colonies. So, Canada's desire to avoid world commitments was laid to rest in the aftermath of World War II. From now on, the keynote of Canada's foreign policy was to be to influence world decisions through multinational organizations

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### **Peace-maker and peace-keeper**

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In 1948, Louis St. Laurent succeeded Mackenzie King as prime minister. Lester Pearson moved into St. Laurent's old job at External Affairs. Pearson had been a career diplomat rather than a politician. Under his direction, Canada in the 1950s continued to work for international security in a world of rapid arms growth and tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. There was also the need to maintain friendly relations with Washington, while defending Canadian interests and views. Canada also strengthened ties with Britain and the Commonwealth, particularly the emerging members from Africa and Asia.

But, it was in the Middle East that Canada passed the severest test of its position as a middle power. In 1956,

following years of border tensions, Israel invaded Egypt. At the same time, Britain and France attacked and seized the Suez Canal which Egypt had nationalized. Canada sought ways of ending the conflict peacefully through the United Nations. Pearson introduced a resolution calling for a U.N. Emergency Force to go to Egypt to supervise a ceasefire. With Canadians among its members, the Force was sent. The British, French, and Israelis withdrew and the region was policed by international peace-keepers. In 1957, Lester Pearson was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in the Suez Crisis.

Three years later, the Congo was engulfed in civil war. Once again, a U.N. peace-keeping force was sent to the area, and Canadians were prominent members. Later, Canadians helped to keep the peace in support of the policy of collective security through the United Nations, serving in Cyprus, Lebanon, India-Pakistan, and elsewhere.

At the same time, thousands of Canadians were working through the United Nations to combat the hunger, poverty, and ignorance that can lead to violence and war.

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### **Linking the old with the new**

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Many of the emergent Commonwealth nations of Africa and Asia had opposed Britain's attack on Egypt. Canada, by not supporting Britain and France and by seeking a peaceful solution to the problem, earned respect from these states. Canada began to stand out as a link between Britain and the newly independent nations of the Commonwealth.

In 1959, the issue of South Africa's racist apartheid laws came to the fore. The South African government had enacted laws which relegated blacks to low-paying jobs, overcrowded and inadequate housing, and poor education. Non-white South Africans were not allowed to vote in elections, nor were they permitted to socialize or marry outside their racial group.

Such racist policies were seen by Canada and the former African and Asian colonies as an affront to the Commonwealth. Canada's prime minister at the time was John Diefenbaker. At the Commonwealth Conference in 1961, Diefenbaker led the condemnation of apartheid, which influenced South Africa's decision to quit the Commonwealth. Since then, Canada has maintained pressure, working through the Commonwealth, on the South African government. It has been a leader in applying economic sanctions which have played a part in encouraging a considerable softening of apartheid laws in recent years.

During the 1950s and 60s, Canada also began to increase the amount of aid it contributed to developing countries. The Colombo Plan of 1950, in which Canada was a full participant, directed technical and other aid to Asian members of the Commonwealth. Canada also began to offer food aid and technical help to the newly emerging countries of Africa.

## Canada charts its own course

Living next to the most powerful nation in the world has its advantages and disadvantages. It certainly helps Canada economically to be close to the commercial powerhouse that is the United States. Traditionally, Canada has tried to avoid too close a relationship, economically and politically with the United States. In the economic realm, this has prompted the search for 'counterweights' to the preponderant American influence on the Canadian economy and a preference for multilateralism and alternative markets in trade. Politically, Canadian governments have had to consider the limits of sympathy for American policy. Thus, for example, Canada maintained its diplomatic and commercial relations with Cuba after Fidel Castro came to power; Canada also embarked on major sales of wheat to China, when American policy was distinctly hostile to both communist states. When the United States became increasingly mired in the Vietnam War, Lester Pearson (by then prime minister) attempted, unsuccessfully, to prod the American government to adopt a more conciliatory approach. That dissent was not welcomed in Washington.

But, there were many positive aspects to Ottawa's relations with the U.S. during this period — one was the Auto Pact. Signed in 1965, the agreement set up free trade in cars and car parts between the two nations. One result of this was that large numbers of cars made in Canada were sold in the U.S., providing much-needed jobs for Canadian autoworkers.

## The Trudeau era

Lester Pearson retired in 1968 and Pierre Trudeau became prime minister. Unconvinced that Canada's traditional approach to international affairs served Canada's interests and reflected Canadian attitudes, Trudeau launched a review of Canada's foreign policy. In 1970, Canada's goals were spelled out: they were to "foster economic growth, safeguard sovereignty and independence, work for peace and security, promote social justice, enhance the quality of life, [and] ensure a harmonious environment."

Trudeau also worked, in the words of his biographer George Radwanski, "to further the cause of national unity at home by ensuring that Canada [maintained] a fully bicultural presence abroad..." New links were forged with the nations of the Pacific Rim, Latin America, and francophone Africa. Ties with these regions reflected the growth in their importance as source countries for immigrants. Canada increasingly projected it-

self to the world as a multicultural and bilingual nation.

While Canada grew in stature on the world stage, especially among developing nations, its relations with the United States were sometimes strained. Government policy reflected the concern of many Canadians that American interests had too much control of Canada's economy. The Foreign Investment Review Agency (FIRA) and the National Energy Programme (NEP) addressed that concern. Both were unpopular in the United States, as well as in parts of Canada.

Though it had been critical of 'Pearsonian internationalism' at the outset, the Trudeau government devoted increasing attention to the lessening of international tensions (both in the context of the Cold War between East and West and in the dialogue between developed countries of the North and the less-developed countries of the South). Particularly in his final years in office, the prime minister assigned a personal priority to this work, though his 'Peace Mission' bore little fruit.

## Strengthening international ties

In recent years, Canada has continued to look outward in foreign policy. It has encouraged the development of La Francophonie — an organization of French-speaking nations which held its second summit meeting in Quebec in 1987. There has been a continuation of strong support for the Commonwealth and the United Nations. And, in 1990, Canada joined the Organization of American States.

Canada has also worked for better trading relations among nations of the world. Through groups such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and G7 (a group of the Western world's seven leading economies) Canada has pushed for freer international trade. However, the growth in regional trading blocks, such as the European Community, has tended to encourage more protectionism in world commerce. For its part, the Canadian government negotiated a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States which came into effect in 1989.

The FTA reflects the development of friendlier relations with the United States which has taken place since Brian Mulroney became prime minister in 1984. The relaxation of foreign investment rules and an opening of the oil and gas industry have also been welcomed in the United States.

Canada has matured as a nation in the 60 years since the Statute of Westminster was proclaimed. One reflection of that increasing maturity has been a greater willingness to accept responsibility and to make commitments as part of the international community of nations. Throughout this period, our foreign policy has reflected the values and concerns Canadians have in common.

Additional information on the development of Canada's foreign policy may be obtained from the Foreign Policy Communication Division, External Affairs and International Trade Canada, 125 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ont., K1A 0G2



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