

The Canadian Diplomatic Service

By H. GORDON SKILLING

THE establishment of an independent Canadian diplomatic service, with diplomatic representation in many capitals abroad, has been primarily an accompaniment and a reflection of the growth of Canada's external responsibilities during the second World War. The significant role of Canada during the war and the multiplication of Canada's post-war external interests made an expansion of the machinery of diplomacy imperative. Indeed the outbreak of war had found Canada most inadequately equipped to meet the demands of the new situation. In 1939 her only diplomatic missions abroad were the legations in Washington, Paris, Tokyo, Brussels and the Hague, and the High Commissioner's Office in London. In the case of the Low Countries a single Minister was expected to commute between the two capitals. Canada did not possess a single consulate. Most of the ground gained in fifteen years of diplomatic representation abroad had been lost by the end of 1941, with the closing of the legation in Tokyo after Pearl Harbour, and the transfer of the missions in Europe to London after the German occupation. The course of the war, however, brought in its train the sending of new diplomatic missions to Soviet Russia, China, certain Latin American countries, the Allied Governments in London, and eventually, the liberated European countries, and the sending of High Commissioners to the other Dominions. At the present time therefore Canada is represented diplomatically in twelve foreign countries and has High Commissioners in the United Kingdom, the Dominions and Newfoundland which are the equivalent of diplomats in all but form. Moreover the elevation of the minister in Washington

to the rank of ambassador in 1943 was followed by the establishment of other embassies, thus introducing the principle that Canada's representatives in all important foreign capitals will in future be of ambassadorial rank. The reverse side of this development has been the transformation of Ottawa into a diplomatic centre of some importance, with twenty-three countries represented there by ambassadors, ministers or high commissioners.

These war-time trends in Canadian diplomacy represented, of course, the enlargement of a machinery for external representation, for which the first foundations had been laid in 1926. It was in that year that the announcement was made by the Canadian Government of its intention to send a minister to Washington, an intention which the Balfour Report, in the same year, welcomed, implicitly endorsing the principle of separate Dominion representation.

Early Developments

Yet the initiation of diplomatic representation in that year and the years that followed must be considered itself merely a projection of a development which had been taking place since Confederation, namely, the rise of permanent and independent representation of Canada abroad to meet the growing needs of the Canadian community in the outside world.¹ There were many predecessors to the Canadian diplomats now at work in other countries. Immediately after Confederation emigration agents were sent abroad, representing successively the departments responsible for immigration promotion. During and after the eighties commercial agents, later called trade commissioners, were stationed abroad, representing at

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1. See H. Gordon Skilling, "The Development of Canada's Permanent External Representation," (*Annual Report, Canadian Historical Association*, 1943, p.p. 82 ff.).

first the Department of Finance, and later, the Department of Trade and Commerce. In London even the sending of a high commissioner in 1880 did not mark the beginning of representation, since this resident agent had been preceded by the Chief Emigration Agent, usually stationed in London, and during the seventies by Sir John Rose, at one time known as the "Financial Commissioner for the Dominion of Canada." In Paris there has been continuous representation of Canada since 1882, when the Commissioner-General was appointed, at first representing both the Province of Quebec and the Dominion of Canada, eventually solely the Dominion. In Washington there has been unbroken representation since 1918, when the necessities of close economic collaboration led to the sending of the Canadian War Mission. Even when its work was concluded, one of its members remained in the American capital, as agent of the Department of External Affairs, until the opening of the Legation in 1927. In the League of Nations system, Canada soon found that her membership in both the League and the International Labour Organization, especially her continuous representation in the Governing Body of the latter, necessitated a permanent form of representation in Geneva. This led to the appointment in 1925, of an Advisory Officer, later re-named the Permanent Delegate, who remained in Geneva until the demise of the League. None of these representatives had diplomatic or even consular rank. Most of them were representatives of particular departments, and not of the government as a whole. All of them, in the absence of diplomatic representatives of Canada, informally came to act for the government and to serve as general agents of the Dominion. They may legitimately be regarded as quasi-diplomatic predecessors of the diplomatic representatives of the present day.

The location of these early representatives of Canada abroad reveals the wide geographic spread of Canadian external interests, even during the first

half-century after Confederation. The United Kingdom, the United States and France were naturally the countries where the need for Canadian representation was greatest. Nevertheless emigration agents were sent to other European countries, and much of the work of certain agents in the United Kingdom related to the promotion of emigration from the continent. Had it not been for the hostility of most European governments to emigration propaganda within the borders, Canada's representation in Europe would have certainly been much more extensive. Following the great war, Canadian emigration agents were stationed, for the purpose of selecting immigrants, in Antwerp, the Hague, Hamburg, Danzig, Riga, Bucharest and Paris, and for visaing passports, in Hongkong. Commercial representation had an even broader sweep. Commercial agents or trade commissioners were to be found, apart from the British Isles, the United States and France, in all the British Dominions, in China, Japan, British Malaya, India and Ceylon, in Norway, the Netherlands, Germany, Russia, Belgium, Egypt, and Italy, and in Mexico, Argentina, Cuba, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Panama, Peru and the British West Indies. The creation of the permanent office in Geneva indicated Canada's special interest in international problems other than her relations with Great Britain and the United States and the need for semi-diplomatic representation at the seat of the international organizations of which she was a member. In brief, the system of permanent representation preceding the Canadian diplomatic service was world-wide in scope and touched every continent and every ocean at some point.

Permanent Representation

The rise of permanent representation, it has been shown elsewhere,² was a reflection of the specific needs of

2. See the article cited above, and the forthcoming book by the author, *Canadian Representation Abroad* to be published under the auspices of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, by the Ryerson Press.

the Canadian state at successive periods of its national development and of the inadequacy of the British diplomatic and consular service to fulfill those needs. Distinctively Canadian institutions of representation were essential if Canadian interests abroad were not to be neglected or sacrificed by the diplomatic and consular representatives of the United Kingdom. Canada, however, was not then a sovereign state, in the meaning of that term under international law. It could not therefore send abroad representatives endowed with full diplomatic status and enjoying diplomatic immunities. According to all the canons of international law and the corollary of imperial diplomatic unity, Canada could be represented abroad only through the ambassadors, ministers and consuls of the British Empire, considered as a single sovereign entity. The needs of Canada and the requirements of international law were in conflict. A solution was found in the sending of Canadian representatives where they were needed, without diplomatic or consular status. The sacred dogma of imperial unity was not thereby harmed, and Canada achieved at least the substance of independent representation, although its representatives suffered the disadvantages of the lack of appropriate status.

The sending of the first Minister to Washington ushered in a new phase in Canada's external representation. Whatever doubts may have remained as to the sovereignty of Canada and the other Dominions as members of the League of Nations system, there could be much less doubt after the opening of the Irish and Canadian legations in Washington that the Dominions had crossed the threshold of sovereignty in international relations. An exchange of diplomatic missions by two states is normally the mark of the recognition of the sovereign status of each by the other. The diplomatic mission in a foreign capital is the tangible evidence of the sovereignty of the state represented by the mission. The fact that the Canadian Minister was an envoy of

the King did not alter the fact that he was to handle all Canadian relations with the United States, independent of any British control, and was to be responsible solely to the Canadian Government, through the Department of External Affairs in Ottawa. Those who still cherished doubts about the reality of Canadian sovereignty were forced more and more on to the defensive as other legations were set up in foreign capitals. Now this has become a dead issue. The growth of a comprehensive system of diplomatic representation has demonstrated the reality of Canadian independence and sovereignty. Each further exchange of diplomatic missions with a foreign country is an endorsement of Canada's sovereignty by that country. Canada's ambassadors and ministers enjoy full diplomatic status, and her high commissioners the equivalent of that status in the countries of the Commonwealth.

Canada now faces the heavy responsibilities of the post-war world better equipped than at any time in her history with machinery for the conduct of external relations. She possesses a diplomatic service, including the Department of External Affairs and the missions abroad of already considerable dimensions. She has taken the initial step in creating a consular service, with the opening of the Consulate-General in New York City. In the Commercial Intelligence Service she has a corps of trade commissioners, of whom some have already been incorporated in the diplomatic and consular service as commercial attaches or consuls and many others will ultimately be so absorbed under the new procedure of joint recruiting and promotion by the Department of External Affairs and the Commercial Intelligence Service. The foundations for future development have been well laid.

Future Needs

There remains much to be done before Canada is in a position adequately to

fulfil her international tasks and defend her external interests. For one thing, a Department of External Affairs with a total complement of approximately fifty permanent career officers of diplomatic rank, that is, third secretary and higher, is manifestly insufficient for the handling of Canada's diplomacy.³ A very large increase in personnel, so as to double the number of first, second and third secretaries in the next two or three years, is already contemplated and partly underway, with preference for overseas veterans. Such an increase in numbers is a condition of the establishment of embassies and legations urgently required in other foreign countries, including those which are already represented in Canada, such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Turkey and Sweden. Similarly, an increase in the personnel of both the Department of External Affairs and the Commercial Intelligence Service will make possible the building of a consular service and the relieving of British consuls of duties performed for Canadians. It will improve the chances of experienced career diplomats for appointment as heads of mission and discourage the all too frequent practice of sending political partisans of no particular competence for the duties assigned. The addition of new members, especially with the rank of second and first secretaries, will also improve the diplomatic service, it is to be hoped, by building up a body of experts within the Department on the subjects and the geographic regions dealt with. The situation cannot too soon be ended that in the home office of the diplomatic service there are only one or two persons knowing intimately the languages, history and culture of regions such as China, Japan, Latin America, Eastern Europe, even Germany and Russia. Nor can the Department of External Affairs too soon assemble within its ranks more persons with special

competence in fields such as international trade and finance, labour relations, publicity and information, including press, radio and films, etc.

These are matters familiar to the authorities in Ottawa. Steps are already being taken to remove some of these weaknesses. The growth of the diplomatic service in the past five years has been little short of spectacular, and its further expansion is conditional on the availability of new personnel. Even during the war the setting up of new missions was often delayed several years due to the lack of both junior and senior personnel to staff them. In all these respects the Department is paying the penalty for the excessively slow development of diplomatic and consular representation prior to the war and to the lack of foresight of the growth that has recently taken place. More fundamentally, the Department, and Canada as a whole, is paying the penalty for the relative lack of interest in and understanding of international affairs which characterized Canadian parliaments and governments, and the Canadian public, during the past twenty-five years. In a very real sense the Department of External Affairs can only move as fast as the Canadian people and those who govern them.

Conclusions

It may not be out of place, however, to suggest certain actions which a government might take to arouse and focus public attention on our international affairs and the diplomatic service responsible for their management. It is the task of government, not merely to reflect the public will, but to guide and inspire it. First, will the diplomatic service receive the desired attention and support from parliament and from the public if there is no minister to speak in its name other than an already overburdened Prime Minister whom few Canadians identify as the Secretary of State for External Affairs? Surely it is high time to put an end to this absurd situation,

3. This does not include war-time assistants and fourth grade women clerks, totalling about half the above number. Some of these must be regarded as part of the permanent staff.

duplicated in no other country of any importance. Secondly, will the diplomatic service be given the attention it deserves in parliament as long as the main debate on foreign relations occurs at the close of the session on the appropriations for the Department of External Affairs and as long as no parliamentary committee exists to focus public attention on international questions and build up a store of knowledge on these matters among at least a group of parliamentarians in the House of Commons? Surely it is also high time to abolish the anomalous Industrial and International Relations Committee and replace it with a Select Standing Committee devoted exclusively to international relations. Finally, is there not need for the Department of External Affairs to establish a better liaison with the general public than at present exists, bringing the Canadian people more into its confidence through the press conference, the radio broadcast, the public speech, the newspaper article and the film? The informational work of the Wartime Information Board among other peoples has been taken over by the recently announced Canadian Information Service. This lays a heavy responsibility on the newly-formed Information Division of the Department of External Affairs for keeping the *Canadian* people informed concerning their foreign policies and their diplomatic service. It is not, however a responsibility of any one division of the Department, but of the Department as a whole, to provide the Canadian people with an abundance of information concerning their own external relations. Moreover "information" is not a one-sided procedure.

Canada's diplomats need to keep themselves informed as to what Canadians are thinking of them and of their policies. Ottawa is remote enough at best from the main currents of Canadian life, and the Department of External Affairs would suffer greatly from any academic and diplomatic exclusiveness.

Canada faces very great tasks in the coming years. She has come to have complex relations with many countries. She has associated herself actively with the many new international organizations now emerging. Yet Canada has no great experience in international relations, no wide knowledge of world affairs, and no great store of experts in foreign politics. She has only recently acquired even the rudimentary machinery for the control of external relations. She has not in the past demonstrated an independence of spirit and action in handling her external affairs and has often preferred to take a back seat. In the new role in which she has cast herself, as a middle power of considerable authority and responsibility, she cannot afford to leave any stone unturned in the rectification of some of her weaknesses. She certainly has need of the best possible machinery for the conduct of her foreign relations. Beyond that, however, her diplomatic service requires the sustained interest, the informed criticism, and the broad knowledge, of the people of Canada and of the institutions and agencies responsible for educating and informing the people concerning international relations.