

**The End of Imperial Diplomatic Unity, 1919-1928:
Anglo-Canadian Relations from the British Perspective**

A thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of London

by

Mary Kathleen McManus

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ABSTRACT

During the first decade after the Great War, the relationship between Great Britain and Canada underwent profound changes: these years were significant in the transition of the British Empire to Commonwealth. One of these changes included Canada's severance from formal imperial diplomatic unity. From 1919 to 1928, Canada established the same complete control over its external affairs which it already enjoyed in its domestic affairs. Canada's break from imperial foreign policy was a major factor in Canada's evolution from subordinate status with respect to Britain to one of equality. As the senior Dominion, the action Canada took against Britain, by confronting Britain repeatedly in matters of foreign policy, made Canada a leader in the transition to Commonwealth.

Events leading to Canada's legal disassociation from imperial foreign policy began with Resolution IX of the Imperial War Conference of 1917. Although recognition of changes in the imperial relationship came with the Balfour Declaration of 1926, it was the appointment of the first British High Commissioner to Ottawa in 1928 which confirmed Britain's participation in a new relationship with Canada. Resolution IX acknowledged that circumstances had changed in British-Dominion relations. The struggles over imperial foreign policy between 1919 and 1928 assisted in establishing the principle of equal status between Britain and the Dominions. These conflicts contributed to defining the evolution of the Anglo-Canadian relationship in its formal, legal sense. The Canadian involvement in these encounters has

received a great deal of attention whereas the same cannot be said of the British side. Most historical writings have assumed that the reactions of Britain were consistently conservative and passive. The common supposition was that Britain reacted only when pressured by Canada. By reviewing these confrontations from the British perspective, this study will examine the attitudes of and the interaction among the British Cabinet, the Foreign and Colonial Offices in formulating a policy toward Canada in this era, and demonstrate that the transition to Commonwealth was neither inevitable nor smooth.

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INTRODUCTION

Britain and its Dominions: Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, entered the First World War united members of the British Empire. They left the war still officially united. The Great War, however, initiated a series of events which ultimately ended the Dominions' role in the British Empire and eventually led to the Commonwealth in 1931. These events, which dramatically reshaped Britain's relations with its Dominions, centred primarily around the conduct of Britain's and the Dominions' shared foreign policy, frequently referred to as imperial diplomatic unity or imperial foreign policy. The struggles over imperial foreign policy began during the First World War and ended in 1926 when the Balfour Report shattered imperial diplomatic unity and each Dominion took control of its own foreign policy.

This study will examine the reaction to the end of imperial diplomatic unity among British politicians and British civil servants in Whitehall. This study will examine and explore British reactions to the end of imperial diplomatic unity through an examination of British-Canadian relations 1919-1928. Of all the Dominions, Canada, the senior Dominion, was the most persistent in testing the boundaries of imperial unity. At times, Canada enjoyed the support of other Dominions, most notably South Africa and the Irish Free State, in its bid to break free from imperial diplomatic unity. No other Dominion, however, pursued the matter with Canada's single-minded consistency or spearheaded as many precedent-setting developments. As the senior Dominion, the impact of

Canada's actions was decisive and far-reaching. Canada forced Whitehall to wrestle with issues Britain would have preferred to avoid. Canada's importance frequently caused Britain to tailor its responses to the attack on diplomatic unity to the Canadian context. The British Government recognised the centrality of Canada's position and the ramifications of Canada's actions. The struggles between Canada and Britain more often than not set both the agenda and the pace in the transition from Empire to Commonwealth.

British-Canadian relations during 1919-1928 offer an insight into Britain's reactions to the breakup of imperial diplomatic unity and indeed to the collapse of the British Empire. Britain's reaction to these events was influenced by the impact imperial diplomatic unity had on Britain's international strength. Britain recognized its international voice was strengthened by Britain's speaking internationally for the nations in the British Empire, especially the Dominions, as well as for itself.

The struggles which led to the breakup of imperial diplomatic unity were peaceful to the extent that no armed confrontations occurred. Peaceful actions and negotiations earned the Dominions control of their own foreign policies. This peaceful façade, however, hid the tensions and turmoil which accompanied these changes, particularly on the British side. This apparently peaceful transition ending the British Empire also disguised the progression from one stage of change to another. This peaceful transition, although it spared the cost of bloodshed, still caused difficulties. The greatest difficulty arose because there was no clear break from the old imperial relationship to the new relationship. Some of

Britain's greatest hindrances to building a new alliance with Canada arose from the remaining fragments of the old British-Canadian relationship. These fragments gave Britain the mistaken belief that its old association with Canada remained intact and encouraged British denial and illusions in accepting the demise of the old relationship was over. Britain's denial and illusions prevented it from accepting and building a new alliance with Canada. Canada's movement to build a new association with Britain exacerbated British difficulties as Britain clung to the old relationship. From 1919 to 1928, Britain's inability to build a new association with Canada hampered Britain in its relations with Canada.

After the Imperial Conference of 1917, Canada, and some other Dominions were anxious to gain a role in the formulation of imperial foreign policy. Canada, however, waited until 1919 to press its demand for a role in imperial foreign policy. Initially, from 1919 to 1922, Canada supported the continuance of a unified imperial foreign policy and desired a role only in the formulation of this policy. It was not until late 1922 that Canada changed its demand to having complete control over Canadian foreign policy. Britain failed to exploit this Canadian position and missed an opportunity to potentially extend the life of imperial diplomatic unity. The opportunity did not reoccur.

Dominions, such as Canada, believed the Imperial Conference of 1923 marked the end of imperial diplomatic unity. The resolutions passed at the Imperial Conference on treaty-making powers doomed imperial diplomatic unity. The Imperial Conference of 1923 was the turning point in imperial diplomatic relations even though not all parties involved

understood this to be the case. Britain was one such party. While Mackenzie King, the Canadian Prime Minister, viewed the Imperial Conference of 1923 as ending imperial diplomatic unity, Britain did not. Indeed, it was not until 1926 that Britain accepted that imperial diplomatic unity was over. Thus, from 1923-26, Britain's views towards the Dominions and the imperial diplomatic unity were filled with illusions. All the illusions shared the common thread that somehow if Britain could conceive the proper scheme for Dominion consultation on foreign policy then imperial foreign policy would remain intact. It was not until all these various illusions were shattered, in great part through the persistence and determination of Mackenzie King, that Britain finally accepted at the Imperial Conference of 1926 that imperial diplomatic unity was over. It was not 1928, however, with the appointment of the first British High Commissioner to Canada, that Britain took public steps in forging a new relationship with Canada.

From 1919-1928, Britain suffered from one key problem: the inability to keep pace with changes in the imperial relationship. This inability to keep pace with change characterised Britain's lost years of opportunity from 1919-23. During these years, Britain failed to exploit the Dominions' good will about imperial diplomatic unity and to grant concessions that might have extended the life of imperial diplomatic unity. British inability to keep pace with change was also a key contributor to Britain's years of illusions from 1923-26. During these years, Britain believed that imperial unity could be saved. Britain paid a price in failing to keep abreast of the latest developments in British-

Dominion relations. This price was Britain's inability to effectively counter some Dominions' determination to end imperial diplomatic unity. Britain's later cost came from British delays in building new relations with its Dominions. The price of Britain's inability to build new relations with Canada showed in such matters as Britain having no one in Canada from 1926 to 1928 to present and defend British interests.

One of the striking realities of this thesis was how little influence parliamentary or public opinion exerted either in Britain or Canada. The impact of the different men in Downing Street, the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office is significant. The process of disintegration was essentially inter-governmental, executive action by a small number of politicians and officials, and it is therefore on this that this study concentrates.

Many elements contributed to Britain's inability to keep pace from 1919-1928 with the changes in British-Dominion relations, particularly in British-Canadian relations. Three key factors were: the constantly changing personnel in British Government; the inability of crucial British Government Departments to reach a consensus on imperial relations; and, the British lack of understanding about the precedent-setting changes.

The first factor which contributed to Britain's deficiency was the constantly changing personnel in British governing circles. In the years 1919 to 1928, Canada had only three Prime Ministers, Sir Robert Borden, Arthur Meighen and Mackenzie King. King was Prime Minister almost continuously from 1921-28, with the exception of the short-lived

administration of Arthur Meighen in 1926. As it was practice for the Canadian Prime Minister to serve also as Minister of External Affairs, a strong link of continuity in Canadian policy existed from 1921-1928. In sharp contrast, in Britain, the three key government departments which combined to produce the policy regarding Canadian involvement in imperial foreign policy underwent frequent alterations in leadership. Five changes of government¹ resulted in four different men occupying 10 Downing Street and these included the first Labour Prime Minister. The Colonial Office, and the later addition of the Dominions Office in 1925, had five Secretaries. It was the Foreign Office which proved the most consistent in leadership with only three different Secretaries. In addition to these changes the older generation, such as Lord Milner and Lord Curzon, was replaced by the new generation, including L.S. Amery and Sir Austen Chamberlain and, of course, the completely new Labour Government. Since the number of men involved in the decision-making process was limited in both countries, it made the consistency and resolution of the Canadian approach all the more effective against any British initiative. Compared with their Canadian counter-parts, British attitudes and policies suffered from inconsistency and ambivalence at times due largely to turnover in personnel.

A second factor which contributed to Britain's difficulties in keeping pace with change was the inability of crucial British Government departments to reach a consensus on directing imperial relations. The Foreign Office and the Colonial Office were the two most crucial departments in directing the British response to imperial events. Relations

between these two Offices were rarely cordial. In fact, more often than not, the two Offices had extremely strained relations which prevented reaching a consensus on imperial relations. A final factor was the lack of understanding which prevailed in Britain about the motives of such Dominions as Canada and precedent-setting changes occurring in imperial relations. These factors collectively hindered Britain in dealing effectively with challenges to imperial diplomatic unity. These factors also thwarted Britain in keeping pace with the changes. Thus, while many Dominions, such as Canada, accepted that imperial diplomatic unity was over in 1923, Britain did not accept these changes until 1926. The process, moreover, which finally led Britain to accept its new relations with its Dominions was a painful process. It was a process characterised by tensions, internal dissension, and illusions. This process offers an important perspective on understanding British-Canadian relations from 1919-1928.

Over the years, the study of British-Canadian relations has undergone several shifts in emphasis, mirroring trends in British imperial history. The first approach to studying these relations in the 1920s came from what might be termed the old imperial historians, such as A.B. Keith², R.M. Dawson³, K. Hancock⁴ and M. Beloff⁵, who adhered to a constitutional interpretation. This constitutional approach not only set the pattern of interpretation, but established the belief that these events unfolded inevitably. A counter-reaction to this approach in understanding the whole character of imperial relationships came from several quarters: historians such as R. Holland⁶ and I. Drummond⁷ emphasised examining imperial relations through economic relations, while

other writers stressed issues assessing the imperial alliance through immigration. There were similar and equally significant developments among Canadian historians. Older and more traditional historians, such as C.P. Lucas and H. Innes, as with their imperial counterparts, viewed imperial relations in the context of constitutional frameworks and nation-building. In more recent decades the fashionable preoccupations among scholars have centred in Canadian domestic history. Although this has given a broader scope to Canada's imperial ties, encompassing more matters than solely the constitutional issue, it has resulted in the study of British-Canadian relations with a Canadian domestic bias.

Two main assumptions underlay the shifts in emphasis among both imperial and Canadian historians in studying British-Canadian relations. First, the constitutional approach appeared too narrow in focus, and second, the constitutional interpretation had seemingly been exhaustively studied. While the former judgement is correct, the latter is not. Nowhere is this more aptly displayed than in P. Wigley's monograph, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth (1977)⁸. Utilising British documents, he introduced a new dimension which dispelled the theory that Whitehall's thinking on the break-up of imperial diplomatic unity was passive and homogeneous. He remained true, however, to the constitutional interpretation by viewing events through the eyes of the 'victor', Canada.

In recent years, new interest in decolonisation has been growing among historians and some attention has been paid to examining the political and constitutional framework in which that process occurred. The present study should not therefore

be viewed as a return to the traditional constitutional approach to British-Canadian relations because of its focus on the end of imperial diplomatic unity. The ability to draw heavily upon British sources, particularly under-utilised private papers, affords the opportunity to set the political and constitutional framework. British sources also permit the examination, hitherto largely ignored, of the British perspective and emphasis. This approach has also provided the opportunity to tackle some neglected issues such as the roles of Canadian High Commissioners and Governors General in the 1920s. Collectively, these new British perspectives present an overlooked, but nonetheless crucial, dimension in understanding British-Canadian relations in the 1920s.

1. The collapse of the Lloyd George administration in 1922, brought Andrew Bonar Law to power. Ill health, however, unexpectedly forced Bonar Law to resign and he was succeeded by Stanley Baldwin in 1923. The general election in January 1924 produced the first Labour government under the leadership of Ramsay MacDonald. This government last only ten months and in November, Baldwin returned to power where he remained until the general election of 1929 yielded another Labour minority government.

2. A.B. Keith, Speeches and Documents on the British Dominions, 1918-1931, Oxford, 1932.

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-----, The Development of Dominion Status, 1900-1936, Oxford, 1936.

4. W.K. Hancock, Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: The Problems of Nationality, London, 1937.

5. M. Beloff, Imperial Sunset, I: Britain's Liberal Empire, 1897-1921, London, 1969.

6. R.F. Holland, Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance 1918-1939, London, 1981.
7. I. Drummond, British Economic Policy and the Empire, 1919-1939, London, 1972.
8. P. Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, Cambridge, 1977.

CHAPTER ONE

SETTING THE STAGE FOR CHANGE: 1900-1919

The devastation of World War One continued long after the signing of the Armistice in November, 1918. The cost in human lives and the horrific way this occurred left strong impressions upon the young generation for whom the price was so high. Just as a generation was almost entirely obliterated, so many institutions and symbols of pre-war society were either completely destroyed or changed beyond recognition. Many empires disappeared completely, while numerous new countries were founded and a new international power, the United States, emerged.

While the British Empire did not suffer the same fate as her former counterparts, she did not escape the war unscathed. The war and the contributions made by the Dominions - Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa - abruptly strengthened and focused their senses of identity as completely self-governing countries. Canada, for her part, questioned her relations with the Empire and with Britain, and the formulation method of imperial foreign policy more forcefully than the other Dominions. This imperial foreign policy was the last crucial formal link which held the Empire together. Throughout the 1920s, this policy was examined, re-examined, redefined and eventually broken. The break-up of unified imperial policy in the late 1920s ended the formal imperial relationship. These developments set the stage for the Statute of Westminster in 1931, which ended the British

Parliament's sovereignty over the Dominions, and began the commonwealth connection between Canada and Britain.

Anglo-Canadian Relations: 1900-1914

Divergence in Anglo-Canadian relations was evident at the beginning of the twentieth century, as the two countries moved in different directions in such crucial areas as economic and defence policies. The volume and value of imported goods from the United States into Canada had surpassed those of British goods as early as 1888. The American edge over British imports grew in subsequent years. On the eve of the First World War, a staggering difference in trade existed as goods from the United States comprised 65% of the Canadian domestic imports compared to only 21% imports from British goods.¹

Canada's displeasure over her subordinate place to Britain in the Empire expressed itself mainly in defence policy in the pre-war days. In the first decade of the new century, Britain, in its relations with the Dominions, adopted a new approach of consultation. The Colonial Conferences, begun by Joseph Chamberlain in 1887, against the backdrop of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee celebrations, were initially intended to be informal affairs. By the turn of the century, these conferences gathered more frequently and more formally as the British Government sought 'co-operation by Conference'². The British tried to expand the role of the Dominions, through Conference and consultation, in part because the arms race with Germany was beginning to assume serious dimensions.

The financial strain of supporting the Royal Navy, whose responsibility it was to protect the entire Empire, was taking

its toll on the British treasury. Increasingly, the Treasury and the Admiralty looked to the hitherto untapped resources of the Dominions to ease the financial burden. The acknowledgement that cooperation from the Dominions was necessary for the continuance of British Naval supremacy strengthened Britain's relations with the Dominions. The search, between 1900 to 1914 for a new, unified defence policy between Canada and Britain in many respects foreshadowed the search for a unified imperial foreign policy, in the post-war era, especially in Anglo-Canadian relations. The British feared that Britain's strong international presence would be weakened unless the Dominions supported a unified defence policy. This realisation persuaded the British to adjust their relations with the Dominions by including consultation on defence policy. While the majority of the Dominions were content with these arrangements, Canada remained, at times, the solitary opponent, unwilling to be locked into a unified defence policy. Increasingly, the defence question assumed distinct political implications as Canada, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, chose to exploit this consultative process as an excuse to lessen Canada's support for the Empire and further Canada's aspirations for independent status.³ Ultimately, it was Laurier's approach which prevailed because the efforts of the British resulted, not in increased unity, but in the break-up of imperial unity in defence matters.

The beginning of the end of unified defence policy started as early as the Colonial Conference of 1902. Lord Selborne, as First Lord of the Admiralty, tried to impress upon the delegates of the Colonial Conference of that year the

need for a doctrine of naval strategy with unified control of naval forces. He also put forward the British case for financial assistance. His plea was sufficient to obtain pledges of support for the Royal Navy from the Cape Colony, Newfoundland, Australia and New Zealand. Conspicuously absent from the list of contributors was Canada, whose Prime Minister chose to avoid commitment by speaking vaguely about establishing a Canadian Navy.⁴ This isolated stance, so different from the other overseas leaders, became characteristic of Laurier in the pre-war naval arrangements.⁵

Far from being discouraged, British pressure for closer imperial links continued at the Colonial Conference of 1907. Here, several steps were taken to recognise the growing stature of the Dominions. Delegates agreed that all future conferences would bear the title 'imperial' instead of 'colonial'. They also agreed that in future the chair would be assumed by the British Prime Minister, where previous conferences had been chaired by the Colonial Secretary. Finally, they agreed that the self-governing colonies would thereafter be addressed as Dominions, a title Canada had held since 1867. In addition, a new department, the Dominions Department, was created within the Colonial Office. Underlying these British concessions was the hope that they would expand imperial economic links, and more immediately lead to a stronger defence policy and greater financial commitment from all Dominions. While New Zealand and Australia had attended the conference hoping that further aid for Britain would be extracted from the other Dominions, Laurier was successful yet again in avoiding the issue.

It is tempting, in hindsight, to disregard the Colonial

Conference of 1907 as lacking in substantial changes, or to interpret these changes as nothing more than cosmetic or at best 'minimal'⁶. The Committee of Imperial Defence (hereafter referred to as the C.I.D.) would support the assessment that no noticeable gains occurred. Established at the Colonial Conference of 1902, it was not until a decision of the 1907 Conference that the Dominions could refer issues to the C.I.D. or indeed even have a representative summoned for a discussion of questions raised at a Dominion's request. The Dominions never availed themselves of this procedure. The C.I.D., despite its failure in practice, reflected a growing British consciousness that strengthened unity in imperial policy, in this instance defence, required the assistance of the Dominions. Britain gave concessions, primarily through increased recognition and consultation, to have cooperation from the Dominions.⁷ Unfortunately, when the Dominions' support was required in 1909 for imperial defence, British efforts made in the interest of unity proved futile.⁸

Naval rivalry between Germany and Britain produced a crisis early in 1909 when it appeared that Britain was falling behind Germany in the building of dreadnoughts. As the cries mounted within Britain for acceleration of the dreadnought-building program, the British Government turned to Dominion leaders at a special conference on defence. There, the Admiralty outlined two possible options to the Dominions. First, it suggested outright financial subsidy of the British Navy. Or, second, each Dominion could establish and support a fleet to police a designated sphere. For Canada that sphere would be the eastern pacific. In an emergency, these fleets would come together to be directed as one unit. Laurier

rejected both schemes and chose instead to establish the Canadian Navy, of which he had spoken vaguely and half-heartedly in previous years. In 1910 Laurier finally introduced the Naval Service Bill to establish a Canadian Navy. Laurier's decision to build a Canadian Navy was motivated mainly by a desire to avoid imperial commitment. If it was yet another evasion of a unified, British-based, defence policy, at least this time Laurier did not stand alone, since Australia also made the decision to create a navy of its own. Laurier's rejection of financial aid to the British Navy, deeply unpopular in many quarters in Canada, proved irreversible. Having defeated Laurier in the general election of 1911, Robert Borden and his new Conservative Government tried to make a financial contribution to the British naval effort through their Naval Bill of 1912. This bill, which committed Canada to funding the building of three battleships for the Royal Navy, had safe passage through the House of Commons, only to be defeated in the Liberal dominated Senate.⁹ Borden, although dissatisfied, let the matter rest and thereby solidified the growing consciousness of Canadian autonomy and numbered the days for a unified defence policy.

The failure of Borden's Naval Bill of 1912 provides a convenient point from which to reflect on British efforts for imperial unity and the impact of these efforts upon Anglo-Canadian relations. From 1902-12 a pattern of thinking and a pattern of interaction between Britain and Canada had begun to unfold. Moreover, variations of this pattern appears later in the struggle over a unified imperial diplomatic policy.

At each gathering of the overseas leaders during the 1900s, Britain gave a little more to the Dominions in the

realm of consultation and involvement in defence policy, while stressing the need for their financial support and the maintenance, above all, of unity in defence. These tactics proved fruitful, initially, since only Canada stood firm in its refusal to make financial commitments. Canada chose to exploit the British gestures intended to reinforce defence unity, as a means of asserting independence from the entanglements of imperial policy. Canada's hand, however, was forced in 1909 at the height of the Dreadnought crisis. Whereas Laurier had so far been able to avoid contributing to a British imperial defence policy and building a navy, this crisis forced him to create the Canadian Navy. Australia also chose to establish its own navy.

It is impossible not to find irony in British decisions which provided the means for the break-up of imperial defence. Yet, it is difficult to conceive of a more fruitful British approach. The sense of a new position in the Empire was developing in Canada and for Britain to have ignored this would have been disastrous. The British accepted that maintaining unity was their key consideration and their only hope of achieving unity was through concessions that acknowledged the new stature of Canada and other Dominions. This solution was a double-edged sword. In the short term, it did succeed in maintaining unity in defence. Proof came with the Dominions' immediate and unhesitating support at the outbreak of the First World War. Even Canada turned over her two naval vessels to the Royal Navy to be used as the British deemed most appropriate. Consequently, to international appearances, in World War One, the Empire was united and acted as the one force it had always been. In the long term,

however, Britain's pre-war efforts did not produce unity in defence policy. What remains unclear, however, is how long it took before the British Government realised that its concessions of consultation had not sustained an imperial defence policy. Even if British ministers had immediately recognised a new relationship in defence, their confidence about the unity of the British Empire remained strong because diplomatic unity, the most vital link among the Dominions and Britain, was still firmly in the hands of the British Foreign Office. The Great War might have suggested that a co-ordinated defence policy meant unity continued, but it also served to speed up the process which severed the last imperial link of unified foreign policy.

Imperial Conference of 1911

Sir Wilfrid Laurier attended his last Imperial Conference in the spring of 1911, a few months prior to the crushing electoral defeat of his government. It was appropriate that Laurier was able to enjoy at this conference, if only symbolically, the progress imperial relations made during his four terms as Prime Minister. Putting into practice for the first time the constitutional resolutions of the Colonial Conference of 1907, the Conference met at the Foreign Office rather than the Colonial Office. The main sittings were presided over by the British Prime Minister, while the Colonial Secretary acted as a deputy.¹⁰

The Imperial Conference of 1911 produced little in the way of concrete or significant resolutions, but yielded much in the way of symbolic gestures. In these symbolic gestures lay the beginnings of a process which in time severed the most

crucial imperial link: diplomatic unity. In a departure from usual practice, Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, briefed the Dominion leaders on international affairs from the perspective of the Foreign Office. It was the first time that the Dominions had been brought into the diplomatic arena. Grey himself attributed this break from tradition to the establishment of separate naval squadrons in the Empire. If the Dominion forces and British forces were to act under one command then it was essential that a common foreign policy be maintained and this, in turn, required more consultation with the Dominions so that they 'could know, understand and approve.'¹¹

Herbert Asquith, the British Prime Minister, playing to public opinion, chose to describe the Imperial Conference of 1911 as one in which the 'dominions had been admitted into the innermost part of the imperial household'. Nevertheless, Asquith was firm that Dominion participation would, in practice, be strictly limited. He made it clear that the British Government would maintain control of foreign policy and would not be constrained in the formulation of it.¹² A remarkable aspect of these pronouncements on foreign policy was that they evoked no outrage among the Dominion leaders, including Laurier, but were taken as acceptable statements.

Laurier's reluctance to breach imperial diplomatic unity was entirely consistent with his thoughts on Canada's imperial relations. He aimed to keep Canada out of imperial entanglements. Avoiding the web of consultation was a vital factor in fostering the cause of Canadian autonomy. British relief, that the current mode of formulating foreign policy had not been jeopardised, did not lessen discontent and even

bitterness regarding Laurier's persistent and unrelentingly independent stance. Laurier was labelled at the Colonial Conference of 1907, by Sir Leander Starr Jameson, Prime Minister of Cape Colony, as that 'damned music-master [who] is likely to spoil the whole show'¹³. The sentiment strengthened with time. There must have been a degree of relief and of hope among his critics when Laurier was defeated by Robert Borden and the Conservatives in the general election of 1911.

Borden: a new force in the imperial setting

On 21 September 1911, Canadian voters rejected Laurier's bid for a fifth consecutive term as Prime Minister of Canada. The election remains one of the most crucial in Canadian political history. In 1910, Laurier's Government negotiated a reciprocity agreement with the United States which provided for free trade for a wide range of natural and manufactured products, although the bulk of the agreement concerned agricultural goods. The agreement was initially considered a coup by the Liberal Government. It was a surprise, therefore, when the election of 1911 developed into an unofficial referendum which rejected the agreement.¹⁴ The beneficiary of the Canadian voters' rejection of the free trade agreement was Robert Borden, leader of the Conservative party since 1902. Borden's succession to Laurier ushered in a new phase in the development of Anglo-Canadian relations.

As Prime Minister, Borden readily accepted responsibility for external relations, which was fortuitous since his term in office coincided with a tremendous upheaval in Canada's external affairs. Not only did Borden preside over Canada's heavy involvement in the First World War, but he was also

party to the exhilarating and monumental changes which occurred in imperial relations during and just after the war. These changes included membership in the council directing the war through the Imperial War Cabinet; recognition of the need for and commitment to revising the constitutional relations between Britain and its Dominions; and, finally, recognition of the Dominions in the international arena by their signing of the Peace Treaties. Borden played a crucial role in redirecting imperial relations and, in doing so, reshaping Canada as a nation. It is fitting that one of his last accomplishments as Prime Minister was to gain consent from the British Government for Canada to place its own representative in Washington.

Borden's role has been overshadowed in the evolution of constitutional relations between Canada and Britain.¹⁵ Governing the country between the ministries of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Mackenzie King, the two Prime Ministers who have received most of the attention as progressive and nationalistic¹⁶, Borden has been labelled as an imperialist with minimal elements of nationalism.¹⁷ Even when Borden was recognised as a determined nationalist, one historian regarded his adoption of nationalist tendencies as a belated development caused by being largely ignored by the British during his visit in 1915. H.A. Wilson writes:

...In 1913, Borden received an enthusiastic reception in England. In 1915, he was treated with considerably less deference...his presence was not particularly sought, and in many instances he was treated as an intruder. A growing sense of resentment, stemming from an injured pride and fostered by an attitude of supercilious indifference on the part of certain important English Officials concerning Canada's part in the war effort,

led Borden to reappraise Canada's relationship with Great Britain. From this period on, Borden became more national and less imperial in his outlook.¹⁸

This interpretation understates the strength of Borden's nationalism and his role in modifying constitutional relations with Britain, particularly in the realm of foreign affairs.

Borden started as an imperialist. His conversion to nationalism came gradually. Initially, his fight against the trade agreement with the United States represented a reconfirmation of Canadian allegiance to imperial unity. This fight, combined with his attempt to secure financial backing for the Royal Navy in his Navy Bill of 1912, seemed to cast Borden as an ardent imperialist, in direct contrast to Laurier. This impression was incorrect. But as time showed, Borden was equal to Laurier in his ardour as a nationalist, albeit he possessed a different conception of nationalism. He did not find it inconsistent that Canada's growth could occur unhampered within the imperial context. He was convinced that the only possible future direction for Anglo-Canadian relations lay in enhanced consultation. This belief was articulated as early as 1910, during the Naval Service debate, when he was still Leader of the Opposition. In that debate, he enunciated his opinion that defence policy and foreign policy were interlocked and that consultation was required in both.¹⁹ Indeed, of the two issues, Borden placed greater emphasis on consultation in the field of foreign policy. It was foreign policy that was to receive special attention from Borden throughout his premiership.

Although consistent with the historical treatment he has received, it is unfortunate that even those historians²⁰

who acknowledge Borden's successes in forwarding Canada's position in foreign affairs have given little time to exploring the factors which yielded these achievements. Borden's approach to imperial affairs differed sharply from Laurier's and King's approaches. Laurier advanced the nationalistic cause by procrastination and evasiveness which allowed Canada to avoid strengthening its imperial commitment. King, who succeeded Laurier as Leader of the Liberal Party in 1919 and became Prime Minister in 1921, proved a political disciple by employing similar tactics. In contrast, however, Borden chose to work within the imperial structure. Moreover, unlike Laurier, King and his immediate successor in office, Arthur Meighen, Borden enjoyed good relations with British politicians and officials, both on public and personal levels. These ties were such that even after his retirement from office Borden maintained a higher volume of personal correspondence with British politicians than King did in the same period, even though he was by then Prime Minister. These solid British contacts were an asset in Borden's exploitation of the imperial system to secure agreements and resolutions which increased Canada's constitutional status. His strong British ties, although reinforced by his frequent presence in London during the war years, were established before the outbreak of war.

As has already been mentioned, the election of 1911 must have brought relief to the British Government that Laurier and his assault against imperial unity were replaced by a man of apparently strong imperial leanings. An intimation of this appeared in a letter written by Rudyard Kipling, the author, poet and cousin of Stanley Baldwin, the future Prime Minister,

to Lord Milner:

Yesterday I was at Sir Max Aitken's place sitting in the sunshine while telegrams of the results of the Canadian elections were handed to me on a lordly dish. It's some few years - 7 or 8 - I think - since I have been happy, and knowing that you also must have rejoiced a little, I write to you, to remind you

a) that this busts the Laurier-Botha liaison in what are called our Imperial councils

b) that it sickens Bryce [the British Ambassador at Washington] which is always a work acceptable to God

c) that Fisher of Australia will now have leisure to modify his views on the limited ability of Colonies within the Empire, because Borden will explicitly repudiate Laurier's pronouncement on that subject

d) Australia will be deprived of Big Sister's example as an excuse for nibbling after American "protection" on her own behalf

e) I do believe this smashes the French power for good...

f) It is the making of a new Canada because the United States will now . . . say rude things and that will stiffen Canada's national back...

...Seriously don't you think it's the best thing that's happened to us in ten years? I was so resigned to defeat that I didn't realise what victory meant...anyway it should give us five years of breathing space and one can do three-quarters of anything in that time.²¹

British optimism that Canada was now being guided safely back to the imperial fold was further buoyed by Borden's visit to Britain in 1912. The Canadian Prime Minister was warmly received and quickly taken into confidence during lengthy meetings with Asquith and high-ranking Cabinet ministers, including Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty. Naval matters, which were the focus of discussions during Borden's stay, made a decided impact on the Canadian Prime Minister. Nowhere in his government's throne speech in November 1911 had there been mention of the naval issue, and

yet upon his return to Canada his government prepared and presented the Naval Aid Bill to the Parliament. As discussed earlier, this measure would have provided financial aid to the British Royal Navy by financing the building of three battleships. It was defeated in the Senate, after some of the most bitter debates in both the Senate and the House of Commons in Canadian parliamentary history.²²

One historian has argued that the defeat of the Naval Service Bill caused additional damage to Canada's imperial reputation and tarnished Borden's image in Britain.²³ Certainly, the popularity of his imperial policies varied. Britain rarely appreciated Borden's determination in protecting the interests of Canada, and there was even a note of relief among Colonial Office staff when Arthur Meighen, not nearly as forthright in imperial matters, succeeded Borden in office.²⁴ But Borden's personal popularity in British circles, unlike his policies, remained undiminished during his Premiership and persisted after his death.²⁵

Borden was regarded not merely as the Dominion leader with whom it was agreeable to do business, but also as a colleague by British politicians. At a much later date, Sir Edward Grigg*, prompted by the problems of the Second World War and leadership which were beleaguering Winston Churchill in 1941, reflected upon the leadership of the British Empire during the First World War. Grigg ranked Borden as one of the essential leaders in the British Empire's war effort:

* Sir Edward Grigg was Assistant Adjutant General at the War Office 1919; Military Secretary to the Prince of Wales on his Canadian and Australian tours 1919 and 1920; and, Private Secretary to Rt. Hon. David Lloyd George 1921-22.

I have had the experience of the burden of leadership in war, and I cannot forget how much I owed to the intimate advice and criticism of colleagues like Lord Milner, Lord Balfour, Field-Marshall Smuts, Sir Robert Borden, Lord Carson [? writing illegible] and Mr. Bonar Law. These men had as complete a knowledge of all the facts as I had myself. They had no administrative cases to distract them from the central problem on which decisions were required. They also knew their minds and could hold their own against counter-argument and eloquence. That War Cabinet was the key to the success of our war effort from 1916 to 1918.²⁶

The politicians, among whom Grigg ranked Borden, also respected Borden's capabilities. Balfour, the former British Prime Minister, 1902-1905, and Foreign Secretary, 1916-19, considered Borden a potential candidate for the British Ambassadorship in Washington, at the conclusion of the war. Borden was the only non-British person to be placed on this list.²⁷ Other indications can be found of the high regard in which Borden was held, including a recommendation that Borden be consulted in the selecting of Balfour's successor at the Foreign Office;²⁸ the possibility that Borden be invited to British Cabinet meetings when the United States was being discussed;²⁹ and talk of trying to raise funds in Britain to assist Borden's re-election campaign in 1917.³⁰ Clearly Borden's skills were appreciated.

Yet this does not mean that British politicians viewed him as having been co-opted into their system at the expense of his loyalties to Canada. It was acknowledged, even then, that the reason Borden stood apart from other Dominion leaders was his ability to work within the imperial context without sacrificing the interests of his country. Lord Milner, the Colonial Secretary, wrote to the Duke of Devonshire, the then

Governor General of Canada, from the Peace Conference:

...Borden is very useful here. He is the only one of the Dominion Prime Ministers, who, without ceasing to be a good Canadian, is capable of taking the wider view and whose judgement and influence are really useful on Imperial and International questions.

He is not a showy man, but he is a man of weight. Not provincial, as most of the Dominion Ministers still, almost invariably are. And he is perfectly straight.³¹

The balance which Borden maintained in working within the imperial context without jeopardising Canada's emergence as a nation appears to border on the impossible. How was it that he secured so much with a position which, in hindsight, appears to be marred with inconsistencies and incompatibilities? The basis of his policy - that a nation's growth is not stifled by being brought into closer imperial links - remains implausible. Yet, almost inconceivably, he increased recognition of Canada's stature during his Premiership. One reason for this no doubt was that he himself saw the two concepts as completely compatible. In 1922, Borden wrote of the imperial vision that he held throughout his career:

...I have never wavered in the firm and constant belief that, within the British Commonwealth of Nations, Canada will find her most commanding influence, her widest usefulness, and her highest destiny. With that opinion is coupled a fixed and absolute conviction that the unity of the Empire alone finds its expression in complete autonomy and in equality of nationhood. A strong Canadian national spirit is entirely consistent with a firm purpose to maintain our country in a high place with the British Commonwealth.³²

Underlying Borden's view, however, was the conviction that full consultation, particularly in foreign policy, was essential. It was this opinion which guided Borden in his

imperial relations from the beginning of his term as Prime Minister of Canada. It was, moreover, this steadfast adherence to the opinion that Canada must be consulted, which made him a pivotal person in the evolution of Anglo-Canadian relations in the realm of imperial foreign policy.

The intermediate years: 1912-1916

The role of Canada in the formulation of foreign affairs held great significance for Borden from his early days in office. Borden showed his interest by making himself Minister of External Affairs.³³ Although the department had been established in 1909, in the early years the department was under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of State. Officials in the department favoured being placed directly under the Prime Minister and in 1912 Borden agreed to this reallocation of jurisdiction. From 1912 until 1946, therefore, beginning with Borden and ending with King, the Canadian Prime Minister was also the Minister of External Affairs.

Initially, Borden's own interest in foreign affairs was born out of naval defence policy. He viewed naval policy and foreign affairs as inseparable, and therefore Canada's naval commitment could not be increased without consultation on foreign matters. Quickly, however, his attention shifted towards securing consultation in foreign policy. In the years just prior to the war, he had had no success in securing a stronger voice for Canada, chiefly because his position was weakened by an inability to make a financial contribution to the Royal Navy. Borden's attempts focused on the C.I.D., but his vision that this forum could be developed for improved consultation received little support in Britain and none among

the other Dominions. When British officials reminded the Dominions that ministerial representation in the C.I.D. was welcomed, none came forward. Borden stood alone in desiring to use the C.I.D. for improved consultation. Strangely, after all his efforts, only twice, in the years of 1913 and 1914, did Canada send a representative to a meeting of the C.I.D., and at neither meeting was there a matter related to Canada discussed.³⁴ On the eve of war, Anglo-Canadian relations therefore remained in 'a highly unresolved state'.³⁵

While Borden had failed to secure a Canadian voice in imperial foreign policy, he did, in the pre-war years, make an appointment in the Department of External Affairs which would prove significant in the evolution imperial foreign policy. In 1913, he appointed Loring Christie as legal adviser to the Department of External Affairs. Christie came to the department with an unusual view of Canada. He was a man who had spent most of his adult life in the United States. He attended Harvard Law School from which he graduated in the top three of his class. Unable to secure a post at a law firm in Toronto, he worked for a year in New York and then moved to the United States Department of Justice. A friend in the British Embassy, when he learned that Christie was contemplating naturalization in the United States, intervened and asked Borden to locate a post for Christie in a law firm, either in Montreal or Toronto. The Prime Minister interviewed him and at once hired him as the Legal Adviser to the Department of External Affairs. Christie was third in command at the tiny department where he oversaw administrative and financial affairs. Christie quickly superseded Sir Joseph Pope, the Under-Secretary, as the most influential member of

the department.³⁶ Christie shared Borden's conviction that Canada deserved a voice in imperial affairs. A man who has been described as an 'intellectual in public life'³⁷, Christie helped Borden to think through issues and respond in a fashion which kept him true to his vision of Canada in the imperial setting. Christie's skills became essential during the imperial upheaval in the aftermath of the First World War.

The impact of war on imperial relations

When war broke out in 1914, Canada, and indeed all the Dominions, came to the immediate assistance of Great Britain. The British Empire looked strong and united. The years of dissension over defence policy were forgotten in the theatre of war, as even Canada virtually wrote Britain a blank cheque in its war commitment. This initial enthusiasm was replaced, within a matter of months, by frustration. Borden was angered that Canada was expected to contribute men and supplies, and yet to have no say in the conduct of the war. Even more insulting was the fact that Britain gave Canada no information. As costs mounted so did Borden's frustration, until he was finally provoked to visit Britain in the spring of 1915 in an attempt to gain information and a voice in the determination of the war strategy. His six weeks' visit, however, did little to put matters right. Despite a series of meetings with various politicians and officials, Borden still lacked relevant information on the war effort, although he was pleased with what he believed to be a frank interview with David Lloyd George, the Minister of Munitions. But it is doubtful whether Lloyd George was full and honest in his comments, and in the end Borden returned home with the same

questions unanswered.³⁸

The second year of the war did not reduce the isolation felt in Ottawa. The bitterness felt by the Canadian Government was further exacerbated by the behaviour of Andrew Bonar Law, the Colonial Secretary. Despite pleas for information, presented mainly through George Perley, Canada's acting High Commissioner in London, Bonar Law was obstructive. A degree of silence from British governing circles was due in part to the immense difficulties facing the Asquith administration. Asquith's power eroded as he, and the other Liberals in his coalition, failed to foresee the needs of total warfare. By 1916, Asquith's shortcomings as a wartime leader drew serious attacks.³⁹ By 1916 it became clear that Asquith was inadequate as a war-time leader. It was not until the final weeks of the year, however, that a political struggle brought down the Asquith ministry and replaced it with a coalition headed by Lloyd George. This marked the beginning of new directions in the conduct of the war, but also relevant for this story, new directions in imperial foreign policy and imperial relationships.

Calling to council: Lloyd George and new directions

The early days of the new administration were marked by a whirlwind of change. In a drastic step to achieve order and decisive action, Lloyd George reduced the British cabinet to a handful of men**. Excluded from this inner circle was Walter Long, the new Colonial Secretary. Long pleaded with Lloyd George that his exclusion would cause 'irreparable

** The cabinet contained five members: Lloyd George, Lord Curzon, Lord Milner, Arthur Henderson and Bonar Law.

damage' to Dominion relations. The Prime Minister assured the Colonial Secretary that he realised the Dominions must be further involved in the planning of the war and was intending to make a statement along these lines. This statement came on 19 December 1916 in a dramatic announcement that the Dominions were finally to be called to council in the first official Imperial Conference since 1911. This gathering took on an added dimension when agreement was reached that there would be a series of sessions between Dominion leaders and the British Cabinet, to discuss matters arising out of the war. The name 'Imperial War Cabinet' was given to these sessions. The establishment of this body was an unexpected but significant advancement for the Dominions. The Imperial War Cabinet was to work in conjunction with the Imperial War Conference and provide a forum for the Dominion leaders to discuss other matters, apart from the war, chiefly, constitutional issues.

The calling of an Imperial War Cabinet and Imperial War Conference pleased Dominions leaders, especially Borden. This action appeared directly to refute claims, most notably Asquith's in 1911, that foreign policy must remain exclusively in the hands of Britain. Lloyd George received generous accolades for these concessions designed to provide the Dominions with closer involvement in foreign policy. His concessions, referred to as 'novel' and 'imaginative', intimates that Lloyd George was not only conscious of the Dominions' contributions to the war but anxious to grant them the recognition which Asquith denied them. One historian applauded Lloyd George's repudiation of his predecessor's exclusionary policy towards the Dominions' war contribution:

Lloyd George, in one bold and imaginative stroke, not only repudiated such a policy but created the machinery through which the dominions might achieve the sharing of authority in the conduct of foreign policy.⁴⁰

Lloyd George explained his reasons in his memoirs. He called the Dominions to council because he favoured constitutional advancement for them. 'During the four years of war they [the Dominions] all had their full share of the hard fighting and privations...They had all won their right, long before 1917, to an honoured seat at the War Council of the Empire.'⁴¹

Lloyd George has long been an enigma in British political history. His public image was different from his private image. To all intents and purposes, Lloyd George appeared to be interested in the welfare of the Dominions, but this interest is betrayed by his ignorance of the Dominions as seen in his description of their constitutional status in 1914:

[in 1914] each of these Dominions was completely independent of any direction or control from Downing Street ...Their decision in August, 1914 to throw their resources of men and material on the side of Britain was as much their own as that of the United States of America in April, 1917.⁴²

His statement is incorrect. In 1914 the Dominions had no control over foreign policy or participation in the declaration of war. At the outbreak of the First World War Britain retained the exclusive power to commit the Empire to war and did so. Just as Lloyd George's knowledge of imperial affairs was lacking, so too was his real commitment to constitutional advancement. This lack of commitment the Dominion leaders did not realise until the post-war years. As with so many aspects of Lloyd George's actions, the decisive motives which spurred him to grant these first concessions to

the Dominions in 1916-1919 may never be fully understood.***

Whether committed or not to improving the stature of the Dominions, Lloyd George's calling of an Imperial War Conference and an Imperial War Cabinet marked the beginning of the end for a unified imperial policy.

It was the Imperial War Cabinet that was a Pandora's box for the British. Using the word 'cabinet' in the title was inappropriate, as this gathering of ministers and delegates from various Dominions was neither responsible to one single Parliament nor elected by one single group of electorates. As it evolved, each Dominion had several representatives at the meetings****, whose work was limited since the occasions were used primarily as opportunities to relay information to the Dominions on specific aspects of the war effort. Although the Dominion representatives were given access to Foreign Office material, direction of the war rested almost exclusively with the five-man British War Cabinet. Even with these limitations, in the post-war era the operation of the Imperial War Cabinet came to be regarded as the finest hour of imperial cooperation and unity. Repeated attempts were made, particularly on the British side, to re-create this atmosphere and to introduce a mechanism for consultation which followed closely the machinery utilised in the Imperial War Cabinet. This was an unrealistic pursuit primarily because of the

*** It has been suggested that Lord Milner, who had long-standing interests in imperial matters, played a key role in persuading the Prime Minister. Vladimir Halperin, Lord Milner and the Empire, London, 1952, p.159.

**** Representing Canada in 1917 were Borden, Sir George Perley, acting Canadian High Commissioner in London, Robert Rogers, Minister of Public Works and J.D. Hazen, Minister of Marine and Fisheries and of Naval Services.

question of responsibility. If a variation of the Imperial War Cabinet was to provide a mechanism for improved consultation in foreign policy, then it had to be determined to whom the Imperial War Cabinet was responsible. Resolving this riddle became even more complex as the sense of independence in Canada, and to a lesser degree in the other Dominions, flourished in the 1920s.⁴³

The Imperial War Cabinet was not a viable method of consultation in peacetime. It did, in wartime, however, allow the Dominions to participate in foreign policy through consultation. This opportunity, although limited, awakened in them a new sense of their role in the imperial setting. This consciousness was reflected in Resolution IX of the Imperial War Conference of 1917 when it was agreed:

The Imperial War Conference are of opinion that the readjustment of the constitutional relations of the component parts of the Empire is too important and intricate a subject to be dealt with during the War, and that it should form the subject of a special Imperial Conference to be summoned as soon as possible after the cessation of hostilities.

They deem it their duty, however, to place on record their view that any such readjustment, while thoroughly preserving all existing powers of self-government and complete control of domestic affairs, should be based upon a full recognition of the Dominions as autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth, and of India as an important portion of the same, should recognise the right of the Dominions and India to an adequate voice in foreign policy and in foreign relations, and should provide effective arrangements for continuous consultation in all important matters of Imperial concern, and for such necessary concerted action, founded on consultation as the several Governments may determine.⁴⁴

The resolution's aspirations to hold a special conference and maintain continuous consultation in foreign policy were never

realised. The resolution, while it failed to bring change, serves as a marker for the growing divergence in the approach of Britain and the various Dominions to changes in imperial relations to 1917. The progress that the Dominions believed they made in securing a voice in foreign policy was reversed in the aftermath of the war. While Canada chose to define an 'adequate voice' in one fashion, the British chose to define it in another manner. The misunderstanding each side had of the other's definition increased the conflict in Anglo-Canadian relations in the years after 1917.

Versailles: international recognition

There were three pivotal events which convinced Borden that Canada and the other Dominions had received an adequate voice in imperial foreign policy and appropriate recognition in the international arena. The first was the establishment of the Imperial War Cabinet, the second was Resolution IX of the Imperial War Conference of 1917. It was, however, Canada's role in the Peace Conference and resulting treaties that satisfied Borden that Canada had finally been given adequate international status.

In October 1918, Borden wrote to Lloyd George arguing that Canada had a right to participate in the Paris Peace Conference. The British Prime Minister agreed and took the demand, for two representatives from each Dominion and India, to Britain's leading five allies****. Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States, at first took great exception to this demand: an indication that he saw the British Empire

**** The big five allies were: Great Britain, the United States, Italy, France and Japan.

as one entity. He tried to argue that the Dominions were eligible for no more than one representative. Lloyd George, breaking with his previous course of action in foreign matters, refused any commitment until consulting his Dominion leaders. Eventually, Canada, Australia, and South Africa received two representatives, while New Zealand and India each had one representative.⁴⁵ In the global setting, Dominion participation in the peace conference had little impact except on various commissions. The large issues, such as the settlement with Germany, were resolved almost exclusively by the major allies. This lack of input did not appear to trouble Borden as his priorities were rooted in the imperial setting, and from this perspective, the Paris Peace Conference was a great success. The mark of Canada's new stature had been confirmed by participation in the formulation of imperial policy as a member of the British Empire Delegation. This delegation, an extension in structure to the Imperial War Cabinet, placed Canada in a position to be consulted and kept informed of all the developments at the Conference. It was Canada's signature on the Treaty of Versailles that satisfied Borden and Loring Christie that Canada's international recognition had arrived and with it a new partnership with Britain in imperial foreign policy.

It remains highly doubtful that the British drew the same conclusion from the events as Borden.⁴⁶ Certainly, there was a shared sense that the structure of the British Empire Delegation was both successful and entirely appropriate. It was, in the immediately succeeding years, the model that the British held up as the best solution for consultation in foreign affairs and one they attempted to revert to even when

it had become outdated. The major divergence of opinion came regarding the meaning of Canada's individual signature, and indeed those of the other Dominions, on the peace treaty. Were the signatures the establishment of a new precedent in imperial foreign affairs? Did they confirm that a new partnership had been struck? From the Canadian perspective, the answer to both was an unqualified yes. From Britain, the response was a qualified yes.

The legalities surrounding the Dominions' signatures on the treaty remained ambiguous. While Borden signed 'for Canada', it was after the signatures of plenipotentiaries from the United Kingdom who signed for the whole of the British Empire.⁴⁷ Arguably, the Dominions' signatures held only symbolic value, and even that symbolic value was questionable. How much recognition did it give the Dominions, particularly internationally? Or, as a more immediate concern, how far did it bind Britain to the Dominions in future international dealings? As the years immediately after the war show, the battles supposedly won by the Dominions in foreign affairs had to be fought again, with Canada taking the lead. The struggle would become such that, at times, the gains made by the Imperial War Cabinet and the Paris Peace Conference seemed more mirage than reality. Yet there remained one solid example of Canada's gains and that was the League of Nations, to which Canada gained immediate membership because of her signature on the peace treaty. Canada's role in the League of Nations during the 1920s, however, was limited and contributed little to Canada's fight concerning imperial diplomatic unity. At the end of the First World War, therefore, imperial relations remained in an ambivalent state.

1. C.P. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 1: 1867-1921, Toronto, 1977, pp. 358-59.
2. Nicholas Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience, London, 1968, p. 120.
3. Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience, pp. 136-37.
4. Philip G. Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, Cambridge, 1977, p. 7.
5. Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, p. 10.
6. Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, p. 9.
7. Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience, p. 145.
8. Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience, pp. 141-46; Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, pp. 6-9.
9. Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience, pp. 148-50; Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, pp. 13-15.
10. John E. Kindle, The Colonial and Imperial Conferences 1887-1911, London, 1967, p. 174.
11. Kindle, The Colonial and Imperial Conferences 1887-1911, p. 195.
12. British Parliamentary Sessional Papers, vol. LIV, Cd. 5745, p. 440.
13. The comment, made by Sir Leander Starr Jameson, Prime Minister of Cape Colony, 1904-07, was relayed in a letter from L.S. Amery to Lord Milner, 16 April 1907. John Barnes and David Nicholson, eds., The Leo Amery Diaries, Vol. 1 1896-1929, London, 1980, p. 58.
14. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 1: 1867-1921, pp. 143-49.
15. R.M. Dawson, William Lyon Mackenzie King, vol. 1, Toronto, 1958, p. 406.
16. This nationalism attached to Laurier and King, and indeed that nationalism which is referred to throughout this study, is that body of thought who wanted Canada to have complete control over all its affairs, both internal and external. This meaning of nationalism is not related to the internal matters of Canada. It is not an attempt to suggest that the two large ethnic groups in Canada, the English-speaking and the French-speaking, had suddenly become one harmonious country in domestic affairs.

17. C.P. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 2, Toronto, 1981, p. 83; P. Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, p. 15.

18. H.A. Wilson, The Imperial Policy of Sir Robert Laird Borden, Florida, 1966, p. 34.

19. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 1, pp. 134-37.

20. Dawson, William Lyon Mackenzie King, vol. 1, p. 406; Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, pp. 15-95; R.C. Brown and R. Cook, Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed, Toronto, 1974, reprinted 1981, pp. 75-93.

21. A.M. Gollin, Proconsul in Politics: A Study of Lord Milner in Opposition and in Power, London, 1964, p. 142, taken from the Milner Papers, Rudyard Kipling to Milner, 23 September 1911.

22. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 1: 1867-1921, pp. 153-161.

23. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 1: 1867-1921, pp. 160-161.

24. Public Record Office, Kew, London, (hereafter PRO), CO 42/1038/55887, minute by H. Lambert, 17 November 1921: 'The history of the proposal for a Canadian Minister at Washington is worth reading as it shows the confusion which it entails in the Empire's international relations. Mr. Meighen showed, to my mind, a far sounder judgement than Sir R. Borden'.

25. D. Lloyd George, War Memoirs, vol. 1, London, 1938, p. 1032.

26. House of Lords Record Office, London, Lloyd George Papers, (hereafter Lloyd George Papers), G/8/11/17, Sir Edward Grigg to Lloyd George, undated but circa 1941.

27. Lloyd George Papers, F/3/4/17, Balfour to Lloyd George, 10 March 1919. Balfour wrote, 'The five most eligible that I can think of are: The Speaker, Lord Richard Cavendish, Lord Haldane, Lord Gladstone and Sir Robert Borden.' Borden made it clear to discreet inquiries that he would not accept the post. The other men on the list also, for one reason or another, refused the post. In time, Auckland Geddes became a serious contender. Geddes, though, was anxious to retire from his post as Minister of National Service and return to an academic life in Canada by taking up a post at McGill University in Montreal. Borden was recommended by Geddes as an arbitrator in his dilemma. Lloyd George Papers, F/17/5/32, A.C. Geddes to Lloyd George, 26 April 1919. While the extent of Borden's contributions in the conflict remain unclear, Geddes did accept the post as the British Ambassador at Washington.

28. Lloyd George Papers, F/2/1/24, L.S. Amery to Lloyd George, 8 June 1918. Amery also recommended that General Smuts be consulted as well.

29. Lloyd George Papers, F/32/4/44, H.F. Batterbee, Colonial Office to Sir John T. Davies, Private Secretary to Lloyd George 1912-22, 5 March 1917. Batterbee opposed the idea which was being mooted and believed Canada should not be singled out as the only Dominion invited to British Cabinet meetings.

30. Lloyd George Papers, F/41/7/33, Caird to Lord Northcliffe, chief proprietor of The Times 1908-22, 26 November 1917, 'Borden has made no arrangements for the election and Athelston cannot now find the funds necessary in Canada and he needs 1-1/2 million dollars from outside sources and wonders if it can be found from friends in Britain.'

31. Bodleian Library, (Oxford), Milner Papers, (hereafter Milner Papers), 383(1), ff. 7-8, Milner to Devonshire, 25 March 1919.

32. Robert L. Borden, Canadian Constitutional Studies, London, revised 1922, p. 138.

33. John Hilliker, Canada's Department of External Affairs: vol.1, The Early Years, 1909-1946, Montreal, 1990, p.58.

34. Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, pp. 18-19.

35. Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, p. 19.

36. Hilliker, Canada's Department of External Affairs, vol.1, pp. 64-66.

37. Hilliker, Canada's Department of External Affairs, vol. 1, p.66.

38. Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, p. 23.

39. K. Middlemas and J. Barnes, Baldwin, London, 1969, pp. 57-58.

40. Wilson, The Imperial Policy of Sir R. Borden, p.37.

41. Lloyd George, War Memoirs, vol.1, London, 1938, p. 1024.

42. David Lloyd George, Memoirs of the Peace Conference, vol. 1, New Haven, 1939, pp. 125-26.

43. Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience, pp. 173-78; Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 1: 1867-1921, pp. 202-17.

44. I.M. Cumpston, ed., The Growth of the British Commonwealth, 1880-1932, London, 1973, pp. 34-5, citing British Parliamentary Sessional Papers, Cd 8566.



45. Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience, pp. 177-179;
Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol.1: 1867-1921, pp.
245-49.

46. Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience, pp. 178-180.

47. Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience, p. 180.

CHAPTER 2

SETTING THE CAUSE BACK: 1919-1922

The restoration of peace left Canada and other Dominions with high expectations for further constitutional developments in their relationship with Britain. The participation granted to Dominions in foreign affairs, as in the case of the Imperial War Cabinet, Resolution IX of the Imperial War Conference of 1917 and Dominion signatures on the peace treaty, pointed to even higher levels of participation and consultation. These high anticipations were bolstered by the continuation of the Lloyd George coalition, which had done so much to further Dominion status in the latter years of the war. The reality was that these years, 1919-1922, failed to secure major advances in the methods of consultation in foreign affairs. The failure is striking not only because it came on the heels of the remarkable progress made in the war years, but also because, in retrospect, the chance for imperial unity in foreign policy, as envisioned particularly in British circles, clearly reached its apogee in these years. These were years of lost opportunity for those keen to maintain close imperial unity.

Canada, who had taken the lead so often before in challenging the imperial relationship in matters of foreign affairs, and would later lead the attack, exhibited her most co-operative mood in agreeing to arrangements for cooperation which would lock her into imperial unity. Canada's first two Prime Ministers in these years, Robert Borden and Arthur Meighen, would have agreed, each in his own way, to closer imperial unity in foreign policy, with proper attentions to

consultation. The British failed to capitalise on these favourable circumstances and it was not lack of opportunity that was to blame. Some writers argue that the close consultation required to resolve issues of the day disappeared with the dispersal of the Imperial War Cabinet and that the restoration of peace removed the urgency to settle the issue. This explanation overlooks the fact that in the first four years of peace, the Lloyd George coalition handled numerous issues, such as the Imperial Conference of 1921, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the Washington Conference, separate Canadian representation at Washington and, finally, the Chanak Crisis, all of which afforded the occasion for discussion and development of the channels for consultation. There were various causes of failure, from the interests and the personalities of participants, such as Lloyd George, Lord Curzon, Lord Milner and Winston Churchill, to shortcomings in the Colonial, Foreign and the Cabinet Offices. It is the combination of these elements which explains the misunderstanding and dissension between Britain and Canada in matters of imperial foreign policy. These factors also clarify why these became the years of lost opportunity.

Lord Milner in the Colonial Office

The cabinet position of Colonial Secretary never enjoyed the same status or power as the posts of Foreign Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer. The lack of prestige and the exigencies of party politics often meant that the post was filled by men who possessed little interest or knowledge of imperial matters. Colonial Secretaries were frequently, respected elder statesmen whose political stars had faded. It

was in light of this practice that the appointment of Lord Milner as Colonial Secretary, in January 1919, seemed yet another positive indication of Lloyd George's commitment to resolving the difficulties surrounding imperial foreign policy. Milner's appointment evoked enthusiasm among those, both in Britain and overseas, who held imperial interests high among their priorities. Not since Joseph Chamberlain had held the post had there been comparable confidence that the man directing the Colonial Office possessed the necessary interest and qualifications.¹

The respect which Milner commanded was sincerely felt and had been earned as the result of his direct participation in imperial matters for most of his adult life. Moreover, his appointment as Colonial Secretary represented not only personal achievement, but also a triumph for that school of imperial thought which found expression in such groups as the Round Table Movement. It is difficult not to speak of Milner and the Round Table Movement in the same breath. Although the Round Table Movement's members were much younger than Milner, he was their mentor. Many of the key participants in the movement in Britain had, as young men, served under Milner when he was High Commissioner for South Africa, 1897-1905. His imperial interests and convictions shaped the outlook of the majority of these young men, who saw the Empire as an under-utilised political force in the continuation of world peace. In order to fulfil the Empire's potential as a world pace-setter, the Movement placed high among its aims the need to maintain and strengthen Britain's imperial unity. The Movement actively cultivated members throughout the Empire and had a particularly strong organisation in Canada. Its

objectives included the establishment of a centralised body, such as an Imperial Parliament. The aspirations of the group appeared to be coming to fruition with imperial cooperation displayed during the war and in the peace settlement, and certainly with the placement of Milner in the Colonial Office. The Movement, however, faltered fatally in the new conditions of the 1920s.

The prevailing belief both in British and Canadian Governments in the post-war era was that the best hope for world peace rested in a partnership between the United States and the British Empire. The realities of increased nationalism in certain senior dominions, particularly Canada, and the emergence of the United States in the world arena, made it clear that the British Empire, even if imperial unity could be secured, could not alone guarantee world peace. This inescapable reality proved a blow to the efforts of the Round Table Movement and left its aspirations outdated. Even its source of inspiration, Lord Milner, shifted away from the Movement in the post-war era as he perceived new solutions to the problem of unity. Although the Movement lingered on through the 1920s, it was only a negligible force.²

Like Lloyd George, Lord Milner's background made him to a large degree an outsider in British political circles. Born in Cologne to British parents, his early years were marked by a strong German influence, which in later years political foes would trot out occasionally against him. Of his first sixteen years, he spent only six, from the age of six to twelve, in Britain. It was not until the death of his mother that he returned to Britain and resumed his education there by securing a place at King's College, London. His background

was neither one of great affluence nor high social connections. His success was based purely upon his intellectual prowess, which was outstanding, and this prowess guided him on scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford, where his career was brilliant and his awards so numerous that it is almost easier to list what he did not win than what he did.³ His presence and success at Balliol was the turning point in Milner's life and opened to him doors of opportunity from which, by his circumstances of birth, he would otherwise have been excluded. As Milner himself was to state it, 'Balliol made me, Balliol fed me.'⁴

Although Milner was linked with a college which educated many of Britain's influential political leaders, his path to public life was remarkably convoluted. After failed attempts in academia, journalism, law and a bid for a seat in the House of Commons, Milner found his niche when he accepted the post as Principal Private Secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Goschen, in 1887. The appointment marked the beginning of Milner's highly successful public life. From there he moved to service in Egypt, then to Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue, from which he resigned to become High Commissioner for South Africa during the troubled years, 1897-1905, which included the Boer War. He took a long sabbatical from public office from 1905 until 1916. His peerage received in 1901 enabled Milner to accept a non-elected membership of the War Cabinet in 1916.

During his absence from public life, 1905-16, Milner maintained a high profile in imperial matters and was an ardent supporter of Joseph Chamberlain and his bid for tariff reform. Although because of his background Milner was more

associated with South Africa, he did possess a number of links with Canada, and had undertaken an extensive speaking tour of Canada in 1912. If his Canadian network and travels paled in comparison to those of L.S. Amery, his Under-Secretary in the Colonial Office, they did set him apart from the majority of other influential Britons and explain in part why he regarded Canada as justified in demanding increased status.

Milner's imperial philosophy was marked by an early recognition of the growing nationalism in the Dominions which would challenge imperial unity, particularly in the field of foreign affairs. An even more unique aspect of his imperial vision was his belief that Britain's only option for resolving the threat to imperial unity was to enter into 'absolute equality by partnership' with the Dominions.⁵ This concept of imperial relations he had fostered, according to his own recollections, since his Oxford undergraduate days⁶, forty-five years earlier:

In that vision it [the British Empire] appeared no longer as a number of infant or dependent communities revolving round this ancient kingdom but as a world-encircling group of related nations, some of them destined in time even to outgrow the mother country, united on a basis of equality and partnership, and united at least mainly by moral and spiritual bonds.⁷

In the summer of 1916, shortly before the collapse of the Asquith coalition which brought Milner back into public life, the future Colonial Secretary addressed a group of representatives from British and Dominion parliaments on the present and future direction of imperial relations. His speech contained two themes. First, he criticised the manner in which the war was being conducted and the lack of an

adequate voice for the Dominions. Milner used these criticisms, however, to develop his second theme concerning the more general course that the British Empire would have to take if it were to continue as a unified institution. He stated that the phrase 'self-governing' was a misnomer when applied to the Dominions, and would remain so as long as foreign matters, and war and peace remained outside their control. He also found fault with Britain's assessment of imperial relations: he said he thought they were blind to the sentiment actually growing in the Dominions. 'Very gradually,' explained Milner,

very temperately, but with increasing frequency and insistence, the leading statesmen of the Dominions have begun calling attention to the anomalies of the position, and warning us that things cannot go on indefinitely as they are, and that if the Dominions are going to accept - as they are most willing to do, indeed as they are actually doing - a substantial share in the burden of the Empire, they are entitled and they will expect to share also in the supreme direction of the Empire's destinies.

Looking ahead, he gave little hope to a peace negotiated without consultation with the Dominions. His greatest concern, however, focused on events after the peace settlement: 'there is, I am sure, even greater cause for uneasiness, and indeed alarm, if after Peace we are going to revert to the system by which Imperial policy is left entirely in the hands of a Government which is responsible only to the people of these islands.'⁸ This philosophy, whose ambition surpassed most of his colleagues, Milner carried with him into the Colonial Office in 1919.

While his vision remained consistent, from 1916 to 1919 his means of realising it changed. In 1916, reflecting the

same line of thought as the Round Table Movement, he advocated an Imperial Cabinet, filled with representatives from Britain and the Dominions which, as the executive of an Imperial Parliament, itself an assembly of representatives of constituencies throughout the Empire, would supersede the British Cabinet in directing imperial matters, primarily those of foreign policy. Pleased with the apparent success of the consultation achieved within the structure of the British Empire Delegation (B.E.D.), Milner advocated by 1919 the method of consultation employed with the B.E.D. as the appropriate machinery.⁹

With such clearly defined imperial ideas, there were anticipations both in Britain and in the Dominions that Milner, as Colonial Secretary, would effect change and bring about an equal partnership among Britain and the Dominions. As events unfolded, however, nothing particularly distinguished Milner's term as Colonial Secretary from those of his predecessors. He possessed more skills and interest than most of his predecessors to act constructively, and yet he failed to do so.

Despite his failure, some studies¹⁰ of Milner have been generously forgiving, citing the exigencies which removed him physically from the Colonial Office and from the Britain. Certainly no other Colonial Secretary in the 1920s had such external demands placed on him. In his two years in office, he was first removed from the daily operations of the department because of the peace negotiations in Paris. Then from December 1919 to April 1920, and again from November 1920 until early January 1921, Milner had to turn over the daily running of the department to his Under-Secretary, Amery, as he

was sent on mission to Egypt. Another consideration of equal validity is that Milner, by this stage lacked the necessary energy to devote to the post.¹¹ Milner would have agreed that he was overextended and exhausted. At the time of his retirement from the Colonial Office, and indeed from public life, he observed: 'With all the odd jobs I have had to do, in addition to my regular work, I do not feel that I have done justice to the Colonial Office. Indeed, I think that I have but little to my credit, in my latest capacity...' ¹² By 1921, feeling the strain, he wrote: 'I am a tired man and unable to tackle fresh work with the same zest formerly, a change will be to the public advantage.'¹³

Underlying most of the sympathy given to Milner, which is justified by the extenuating circumstances of Milner's term, is the belief that had the circumstances been more favourable, Milner would have worked harder to transform his advocacy of equal partnership within the Empire into actual practice. Such an assumption is questionable, as Milner did create a sufficiently commanding presence within the Colonial Office, and this suggests that his practice of imperial policy fell short of what he espoused.

Beginning his term as Colonial Secretary, Milner held the preservation of imperial unity as his highest priority. His ambitions for securing imperial unity were low-key as dictated by the post-war atmosphere. Milner explained to L.S. Amery, his Parliamentary Under-Secretary, that Britain faced 'a bad re-action in constructive Imperial politics, but if we can weather the next year or two without letting everything that was achieved during the war go absolutely to pieces, it should be possible to rebuild on the foundations then laid.'¹⁴ In

his absence, Milner granted Amery a broad latitude of discretion in the conduct of daily business. He did not, however, allow Amery's boundless energy and enthusiasm to run unchecked. Amery was constantly conceiving schemes to increase consultation with the Dominions. Milner stopped all such initiatives in the early stages.¹⁵ One example, which persisted throughout Milner's tenure, was Amery's keenness to mount the constitutional conference promised in Resolution IX of the Imperial War Conference of 1917.¹⁶ In this matter, as with Amery's other initiatives, Milner held to the position that the initiative rested with the Dominions and therefore the Colonial Office should pursue the issue only when requested to do so by the Dominions.¹⁷

It is questionable how effective Milner's passive stance was even in securing his goal of maintaining the new Dominions' status achieved in the war and peace negotiations. Against the Canadian political environment, Milner's approach succeeded only in furthering the cause of those wishing complete self-government. Since the conclusion of the peace negotiations, the leadership of the Canadian Government had been in a state of flux. Borden remained Prime Minister virtually in name alone, as persistent ill health forced extended leaves and the daily running of affairs fell to others. Borden submitted his resignation in late 1919, but retracted it when it became apparent that the coalition government would fall under any other leader. Finally, in mid-1920, Borden's second resignation stood and Arthur Meighen succeeded him as leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister. Meighen's term was plagued with difficulties as the wartime coalition government slowly disintegrated. Even if

Meighen had not been totally preoccupied by domestic problems, he would not have initiated much change in consultation in foreign matters. Imperial questions, such as the conduct of foreign policy, held little interest for Meighen as he found little to question in the imperial relationship. From his vantage point, the present status of imperial affairs was more than acceptable.¹⁸ Between Meighen's complacency and Milner's view that the initiative rested with the Dominions, Canada was not the menace that it would have been if Borden's ill health had not constrained him. As will be seen, it was Borden's determination which achieved the decisive concession of Canada's right to have a Canadian representative in Washington. Apart from this effort, Canada brought no significant pressure to bear upon the British Government which might have secured substantial changes in the imperial relationship. This diminished Canadian presence allowed many in Whitehall to ignore the evolution which was imperceptibly occurring in the realm of imperial foreign affairs.

It is unrealistic to lay the blame for Canadian inaction on Milner, as this clearly did not fall within his jurisdiction. But within the realm of British practice, Milner failed to maintain the status achieved by the Dominions during the war years. To be fair to Milner, he did attempt to redefine the duties of the Colonial Office as agreed at the 1918 Imperial War Cabinet. The reforms, primarily an administrative matter, reflected the evolving relationship. In 1918, the Dominion premiers were given direct telegraphic access to the British Prime Minister. The Dominion leaders explicitly made this request, because they wished to restrict the authority which the Colonial Office might exercise in

their affairs. If the reforms bore witness to the evolution of the imperial relationship, then their implementation on the British side revealed how little attention was being given to the changes. While the cables were now sent directly to Lloyd George, they were still decoded in the Colonial Office, and responses were usually prepared in that department. This practice was encouraged by Milner's predecessor in the Colonial Office, Walter Long. Tackling this issue of communication was one of Milner's first tasks as Colonial Secretary.¹⁹

Milner recognised that Lloyd George gave little attention to imperial matters, let alone to the contents of these telegrams, and so he approached the only man he believed was concerned, Maurice Hankey, Secretary to the Cabinet.²⁰ Milner argued that under the agreement of 1918 on communication, it was the jurisdiction of the Cabinet Office, not the Colonial Office, to be handling these communications. He did not mind the Colonial Office being consulted, so long as the Cabinet Office accepted responsibility. Although the matter remained in abeyance from November 1919 until January 1920, while Milner was in Egypt, the Colonial Secretary did meet with a degree of success in early January when the Australian Prime Minister, W.M. Hughes, requested and obtained a cipher separate from the Colonial Office. Canada, for her part, continued under the Colonial Office cipher. Milner, also, met with success in the small issue of circulating Cabinet papers to the Dominions. He forced the task upon the Cabinet Office, instead of reducing the Colonial Office to a postal service. But even in this matter, it was more of a fine detail, because

the task of selecting the appropriate papers for circulation fell to the Colonial Office staff.²¹

These administrative reforms were practically all that Milner accomplished in implementing changes in the imperial relationship. Perhaps if he had had better circumstances, more might have been achieved. But even in what he did achieve, a line of thinking can be discerned. Milner still saw the future of a unified Empire in the form of an equal partnership, which could be attained only through increased communication between the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Office, the Dominions and, in time, the Foreign Office.²² Conspicuously absent from his list of the players was the Colonial Office. From the beginning of his term in that department, Milner, instead of fighting to protect the status of the Colonial Office, appeared to do things to undermine its significance in Britain's dealings with the Dominions.²³ His reasoning may have been that the Cabinet Office, and even the Foreign Office, would be forced to deal more and more directly with the Dominions in the absence of the Colonial Office, thus forging a working partnership. If these were his intentions, they fell short of fulfilment and his judgement remains questionable. Milner, in his many comments²⁴, made it clear he understood that the British had little interest in the relationship with the Dominions, but was this the way to raise it? Was it wise to have the Colonial Office, the sole official voice fighting for the Dominions, step back in the hope that in the Colonial Office's void either the Cabinet Office, the Prime Minister or the Foreign Office would come forward?

Curzon and the Foreign Office

If it was Milner's intention that the Foreign Office would take a stronger lead in consulting the Dominions, then he wrongly gauged the prevailing attitudes in that department. Under the forceful and unbending leadership of Lord Curzon, the Foreign Office showed no major change to reflect the supposedly increased role of the Dominions in the formulation of policy.

Curzon assumed the post of Foreign Secretary about the same time that Milner went to the Colonial Office. Aside from the closeness of their ages - Milner was five years older - the two men held little in common, either with respect to temperament, career paths or imperial vision. From an aristocratic background, Curzon decided upon a political career while still at Balliol College, and was elected to the House of Commons in 1886 where he remained until 1898. During his time as a Member of Parliament, he served as a Parliamentary Under-Secretary first in the India Office and later in the Foreign Office. In 1898, at the breathtakingly early age of forty, Curzon became Viceroy of India. His fast-rising star faltered in 1905, when he resigned as Viceroy under a cloud of political controversy. He returned to governing circles in 1915 as Lord Privy Seal, and continued to hold numerous positions, including a place in Lloyd George's War Cabinet. His succession to Lord Balfour as Foreign Secretary in 1919 seemed to be the completion of his resurrection from political ashes and reestablished him as a man on the move. In any event, Curzon survived successive governments and remained as Foreign Secretary until 1924. It was the highest office he attained as he was passed over in

avour of Stanley Baldwin as Prime Minister in 1923. His career was one that touched but never grasped greatness or, as Hankey was to write at the time of Curzon's death, he was 'second class. Not quite first class.'²⁵

One liability which took its toll on Curzon's career was his temperament. Some historians note that by the 1920s, he was a political relic who clung to a political mode better suited to the Victorian age. 'His intellectual mastery, eloquence, argumentative skill and fine draftsmanship, his sense of his own importance and that of his country, his calculated arrogance, the aristocratic geniality which he mistook for tact - these were the qualities, almost indeed a caricature of the qualities, of the superior Victorian person.'²⁶ These attributes meant that Curzon, unlike Milner, did not have an easy manner with people; in fact he was often difficult, inconsiderate and at times cruel, particularly to his own staff. Although Curzon frequently complained that he was over-worked and under-appreciated, he brought these difficulties largely on himself as he trusted his staff little and insisted upon dealing personally with the bulk of official papers. This behaviour took its toll on the Foreign Office and contributed to the low morale which developed at this time. Other factors included the increased rivalry with the Treasury for stature in Cabinet, but more significant was Lloyd George's tendency after 1918 to pass over the Foreign Office and to direct foreign policy himself. Surprisingly, Curzon accepted this implicit demotion, and he did not come into conflict with the Prime Minister over matters of substance until the Near East crisis in 1922.²⁷

While Curzon may thus have had little impact on the direction of major issues in foreign affairs, he did exercise influence in the handling and directing of Dominion participation in the formulation of foreign affairs. This came to him primarily because of Lloyd George's lack of interest in Britain's relations with the Dominions. Despite this involvement, the policy generated from the Foreign Office during the Curzon era was neither consistent nor particularly coherent.

The Foreign Office was torn internally on its approach to the involvement that the Dominions were to take in the post-war era. One factor which hindered attempts to determine a new role for the Dominions in foreign affairs was the continued belief, which reached into the highest circles, that despite all the changes during the war, the execution of foreign policy remained the exclusive domain of the British Foreign Office. In 1921, E.A. Crowe, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, wrote: 'For the present, the foreign relations of the Empire are still conducted by HMG.'²⁸ Behind the outward appearances that business continued as usual, there existed a feeling, shared by many including Curzon, that some change to this relationship would be appropriate. Curzon, however, was not prepared to instigate any action to this end. He, like Milner and like Churchill later, believed that such initiative rested with the Dominions.

Curzon's policy that the Dominions must initiate change was certainly evident in his dealings with Canada on two separate occasions in 1920 and 1921. In both of these instances, Curzon hid behind the statement that the impetus

for change rested with Canada. Curzon used these tactics in 1920 when the United States Government introduced a United States Merchant Marine Bill. The bill's intent was to cut the C.P.R. (Canadian Pacific Railway) out of the United States coastal trade by requiring such trade to be carried by American ships. The Foreign Office, while fully conscious of the serious implications of this bill for Canada, decided that it was Canada's obligation to initiate any action in response. It registered a degree of surprise when the Canadian Government did not act on the issue.²⁹

The Foreign Secretary's determination that Canada launch changes was fortified in March 1921. A proposed visit by Canadian warships to ports in the United States raised the question in Britain of who should inform the United States. The Admiralty suggested that Canada should contact the United States Government. This recommendation disturbed both Curzon and Crowe. It went against traditional practice. The two men were upset further that this breach was suggested, not by Canada, but by the Admiralty. While neither ruled out the possibility of changes in practice, both Curzon and Crowe believed Canada should instigate them.³⁰ This view was supported by Churchill at the Colonial Office who concurred with 'Lord Curzon that the present practice should be followed and that the initiative, as regards any change of practice, should rest with the Dominion Government.'³¹

The Foreign Office's belief that the responsibility rested with Canada to protect her interests was not a new theory. Curzon, in failing to contact Canada, revealed an unwillingness to acknowledge a partnership or even an obligation to protect Canada's interests. This stance, as

shown in the above instances, highlighted the fragility of the Dominions' status. Advances made in the Dominions' status, in the war and during the peace negotiations, would only be sustained through the Dominions' own vigilance. It fell to each Dominion to guard its respective interests, but without the powers to do so. Curzon was content to assume that the usual practice of foreign policy, where it rested exclusively in the hands of the Foreign Office for the entire Empire, would be continued until shown otherwise.

The Cabinet Office and the Colonial Office made attempts to convince the Foreign Office that changes had occurred in the realm of imperial foreign affairs. In 1921, Hankey, in the Cabinet Office, suggested restarting the practice of sending weekly confidential papers to the Dominions through the Cabinet Office. He wished to include interviews with Ambassadors, as had been agreed to by Curzon at the Imperial Conference of 1921. When this request reached the Foreign Office, a junior official went further to recommend that all Foreign Office printed papers be sent to the Dominions. Crowe immediately stepped in and, having consulted with Curzon, quickly vetoed the suggestion and agreed to forward only the interviews with Ambassadors.³²

The Colonial Office was equally unsuccessful in effecting any significant changes in the formulation of foreign policy. Chief among its reasons for this failure was the poor, and sometimes hostile, rapport between the Colonial and Foreign Offices. As mentioned earlier, Milner believed that Britain's relationship with the Dominions was becoming one of equal partnership, so that now their affairs should be dealt with through the Cabinet Office and the Foreign Office³³.

Unfortunately, Milner had not succeeded in conveying to the Foreign Office that the involvement of the Colonial Office would be curtailed and that the Foreign Office should occupy this void. This new approach was never fully understood by the Foreign Office and gave rise to much ill-feeling between the two offices. Since nothing had been stated to the contrary, the Foreign Office regarded it as the duty of the Colonial Office to keep the Dominions informed and to organise any Dominion action. By this arrangement, the Foreign Office was obliged merely to transmit to the Colonial Office relevant material. Under this cloud of misunderstanding, the Foreign Office frequently complained that the Colonial Office was failing in its duty, and used this apparent ineptness as an excuse to resolve matters without input from the Dominions.³⁴ Relations did not improve with the arrival of Winston Churchill as Milner's successor in the Colonial Office. Although Churchill intended that his department should maintain a pivotal role in relations with the Dominions, the Foreign Office continued to complain of 'no support' from and the 'inefficiency of' the Colonial Office.³⁵ The excuses, whether of sound basis or not, provided the Foreign Office with a reason to formulate policy without consulting the Dominions. The need for quick decisions made it impossible to endure the delays that resulted from the consultative process.

The Colonial Office attempted to encourage discussion of imperial foreign policy by circulating in March 1921 a lengthy memorandum entitled 'A Common Imperial Policy In Foreign Affairs'. The chief value of the document is the insight it offers into the understanding among the Colonial Office staff of the Dominions' new status. Beginning with an historical

examination of events since the war years, the document concluded that the peace negotiations and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles were constitutional landmarks in the development of the Empire, as the Dominions staked their claims in the formulation of imperial foreign policy. The document conceded that while in theory it had been established that the Dominions must be consulted, the practice had reverted to the situation where general control had 'almost entirely relapsed into the hands of the United Kingdom.' Careful not to single out any one department or group for blame, these circumstances were attributed to the break-up of the British Empire Delegation and the preoccupation of every government involved with the task of reconstruction. This document found it regrettable, but again without laying blame, that 'In more than one instance critical situations have arisen with the greatest suddenness and have called for decisions of the most far-reaching character, in circumstances in which effective consultation with the Dominions was impossible.'³⁶

The memorandum's underlying theme was the importance of maintaining imperial unity. 'The conclusions to be drawn therefore from the recent constitutional developments are not that unity of policy has become less necessary, but only that the more complete the equality of status the less tolerable, constitutionally, is a state of affairs in which one member of the group should exercise control over a policy which may involve in the most vital interests and even the existence of the others.' The Colonial Office was optimistic that imperial unity could be sustained. Blocks of unity remained on which to build. After all, the Treaty of Versailles, which showed

the individual Dominion signatures under the main heading of the British Empire, suggested this continuance of unity. Moreover, separate Dominion membership in the League of Nations did not render the concept of unity incompatible, even if the Dominions and Britain voted in conflicting positions in the Assembly; the real power rested in the Council and so long as the British representative advocated a common imperial policy, then all would be well. A degree of confidence was expressed that even if another Dominion was elected to the Council - which, given the jealousy of other nations towards allowing the British Empire more than one vote on the Council, was unlikely - unity could be maintained by having both represent a common policy.³⁷

Apart from a discussion on maintaining a unified voice in the League of Nations, the memorandum failed to recommend any machinery of consultation for achieving an integrated policy. It dismissed the structure of the British Empire Delegation as unrealistic since it would at best mean an occasional gathering, perhaps once a year, and it would not provide quick consultations when crises in foreign affairs occurred. The memorandum spoke vaguely of a standing Imperial Committee on Foreign Affairs with authorised Dominion representatives, but conceded that the Dominions would probably not be co-operative. It concluded by suggesting that the solution might entail having permanent ministerial representatives in London whose task it would be to keep their home governments informed and who would be empowered to convey their views and aims. None of the schemes was explored in any depth nor was it even indicated which office - the Colonial, Foreign or Cabinet Offices - should take the lead in resolving the matter.³⁸ The

lack of solid recommendations left Foreign Office officials with the opportunity, of which they availed themselves, to avoid tackling the issue. 'It discusses', wrote Crowe of the memorandum, 'in a vague manner the difficulties inherent in the problem of setting up machinery for participation by the Dominions in the conduct of our Foreign relations. It does not pretend to offer any solution, and is quite anodyne.'³⁹

Curzon and Crowe may have been relieved that the Colonial Office's memorandum was sufficiently vague that no response had to be mustered, but they would have agreed with the overall theme that the vital task was to maintain imperial unity, or, from the Foreign Office's perspective, sustain the appearance of imperial unity.⁴⁰ In the new international order established in the aftermath of the war, the Foreign Office needed the strong voice of speaking not only for Britain and her dependencies, but also for Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India.

The Great War had eroded the British Empire's power in international affairs. Admittedly, Germany no longer rivalled Britain, but new challenges emerged to Britain's world status. The United States had a formidable international presence financially, militarily and politically, which Britain could not ignore in these circumstances. Whitehall was conscious of the strength given to the British voice in foreign affairs when the Foreign Secretary spoke not only for Britain but for the Empire as well. The Dominions provided a significant buttress against the growing international influence of the United States. The Foreign Office, keen to protect the invaluable commodity of imperial unity, chose not to conceive innovative ways of broadening consultation, but continued to

conduct the foreign policy for all the Empire and to wait until forced to give way on a particular point by a Dominion.

This approach was successful in the years immediately after the war, because normally assertive Dominions, such as Canada, were preoccupied with domestic issues and gave little attention to international affairs.⁴¹ This changed, however, when renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance became an issue and Canada, together with other Dominions, had not only an interest but wanted a voice in the matter. Dissensions over renewal of the alliance dominated the Imperial Conference of 1921, chaired by the new Colonial Secretary, Churchill.

Churchill in the Colonial Office

Milner groomed Amery as his successor, but Lloyd George chose to appoint Winston Churchill as his next Colonial Secretary. The passing over of Amery was not politically surprising, since in 1919, Milner had had to employ a strong hand to fight Lloyd George's opposition to Amery's appointment as his Under-Secretary.⁴² Amery's departure from the Colonial Office, when he shifted to the Admiralty as a Parliamentary and Financial Secretary in April 1921, silenced a voice which had taken an interest in the Dominions and their constitutional relationship with Britain. Although his protégé was not appointed, Milner was generous enough to credit Churchill with being 'very keen, able & broad minded.' Milner's major concern was that the new Colonial Secretary was 'too apt to make up his mind without sufficient knowledge.'⁴³

Churchill's appointment to the Colonial Office marked a full political circle for him. It was in this office that he had begun his ministerial career in 1905, as Under-Secretary

of State. Despite this previous experience, he was not interested in the Dominions. His term as Colonial Secretary contained many of the same features as the tenure of Milner. The most striking similarity was that Churchill's attention was diverted from the daily function of the office as he became preoccupied with problems first in the Middle East and later in Ireland. The difference between the two men was that Milner had not sought to avoid the daily running of the office, as the missions to Egypt were imposed upon him, whereas Churchill assumed the post intending to concentrate most of his attention on the Middle East question. His involvement in the Middle East 'entanglement' and bringing the mandated territories under the Colonial Office were the terms that he set for accepting the post.⁴⁴

Aside from these external distractions, the differences between the two men outweigh similarities when their tenures are contrasted. In political terms, Churchill's appointment was a gain for the Colonial Office, since one of Milner's traits, which operated to the detriment of the department, was his disdain for the rough and tumble of politics.⁴⁵ This stance had disadvantaged him and the Colonial Office in dealings with Lloyd George, a man who thrived on the political game. Indeed, it could be argued that Lloyd George preferred the playing of politics to the advancement of policy through politicking. The appointment of Churchill not only gave the Colonial Office a chief who played the sport of politics well, but one who, unlike Milner, enjoyed a healthy rapport with Lloyd George and who appeared to be in the inner circle of Lloyd George's administration. Nevertheless, the political skill and edge that Churchill brought to the

Colonial Office did not prove beneficial to the Dominions. Unlike Milner, he had no progressive vision as to the future direction he wished British-Dominion relations to take. Churchill's lack of interest in the Dominions frequently meant that he failed to give even minimal attention to the conduct of their business. Without even knowing the dates of his missions to Egypt, Milner's absence is evident to a reader of the correspondence of the Colonial Office with the Dominions. Invariably, Milner initialled each item and more frequently than not he added his own comment. During Churchill's term it is difficult to find his initial on most documents concerning the Dominions, let alone to gauge through these documents his comings and going.⁴⁶ For all his indifference to Dominion relations, Churchill did possess a concept of imperial relations which was far more traditional than progressive in character, and in many respects he ignored the advances supposedly secured during and just after the war. The fact that he gave little attention to the imperial relation may have been an asset for the Dominions, because his involvement would have probably set back, not advanced, their status. Contrary to the approach of his predecessor, Churchill opposed any reduction of the Colonial Office's involvement in relations between the Dominions and the British Government, as was shown when the issue of communication arose.

Just prior to the Imperial Conference of 1921, Churchill heard that General Smuts, the Prime Minister of South Africa, might submit a proposal that Dominions affairs be removed from the Colonial Office and placed directly under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister. While it is highly likely that Milner would have supported this scheme, which conformed with his

attitude, Churchill was strongly opposed. He wrote to Lloyd George, and argued his case:

I do not think that this would be a good plan...My advice is (a) that correspondence on important matters between the Prime Ministers of the Dominions and the British Prime Minister should continue to be direct, the Colonial Secretary advising the Prime Minister as required; (b) that routine work should be discharged as at present by the existing staff in their present premises; (c) that the name of the Colonial Office should be changed to some other title which avoids the word Colonies. I should be quite agreeable to "Overseas Affairs", or as suggested by Chamberlain "Dominions beyond the Seas".

It is interesting that while Churchill desired to retain the actual decision-making process, he was willing to support outward trappings that suggested a higher recognition of the Dominions. Churchill disclaimed all personal interest in the matter. 'In putting this view before you', he wrote to Lloyd George explanation, 'I am having regard solely to what I believe to be the best and most practicable arrangement at the present time, and not at all to the personal feelings of the temporary occupant of a particular post in Government.'⁴⁷

Churchill's opinions on imperial relations were never discussed outside Whitehall, and it was not until the Chanak Crisis of 1922 that his views were conveyed to the Dominions. Until then the Canadian Government held Churchill in fairly high regard. Even Peter Larkin, the new Canadian High Commissioner in London, who later proved his sensitivity to any British politician or official who clung to the traditional imperial views of Canada, found his first meeting with Churchill a pleasant one. Writing to his Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, in April 1922, he noted that the Colonial Secretary 'expressed himself most kindly...[and his] whole

demeanour was most pleasant and sympathetic.⁴⁸ This favourable initial impression did not survive the Chanak Crisis, but it did survive the clash over the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

Anglo-Japanese Alliance

During the Imperial Conference of 1921, the first to be held since 1918, although not the promised constitutional conference, the Dominions' role in imperial foreign policy became the focus of the conference. The Dominions' role was not an issue of theory, but rather an issue of actual practice as the controversy regarding the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance grew. This military alliance between Japan and Britain began in 1902 in response to Russian expansion in the Far East. The emergence of the German threat in 1904 increased the alliance's importance. Freed of anxiety about Russia in the Far East, Britain concentrated on the German threat. The alliance was redrafted and renewed in 1905. The new terms provided aid to either party in the event of an unprovoked aggression by a third party. Japan's potential enemy increasingly became China and the United States. Britain negotiated new terms for the alliance when it was renewed in 1911 because of its concern that it could be embroiled in a conflict between Japan and the United States. The alliance of 1911 stated that neither party would be obliged to go to war with a power with whom a treaty of arbitration was in force. Britain signed such a treaty with the United States in 1914. The alliance of 1911 remained in force until 1921 when once again the need to renew arose.

The international scene of 1921 differed from the international scenes which shaped previous alliances. The original reasons for the alliance disappeared in the post-war era. The German and Russian threats were gone. Britain weighed the advantages and disadvantages of renewal. Strong British advantages existed in renewing the alliance. The possibility existed that the Russian and German threats could re-emerge. If no alliance continued, then Japan might fall prey to Russo-German advances. The British Empire also faced military vulnerability in the Far East if Japan was not curbed by an alliance. Britain's main consideration involved Japan's potential anger. Japan had been a loyal and powerful ally throughout the alliance and Japan wanted the alliance renewed. American hostility presented the greatest threat to the alliance's renewal. Since 1900, the American-Japanese rivalry in the Far East increased steadily especially over China. British renewal of the alliance would place the British-American friendship in jeopardy. Britain faced a choice between potential Japanese hostility and its friendship with the United States.⁴⁹ It was the potential alienation of the United States, if the alliance was renewed, which caused dissenting voices within the British Empire. The strongest protests came from Canadian circles.

Initially, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance appeared, because of the dissensions among the Dominions and Britain, to challenge imperial unity and force the British Government to consult with the Dominions. Certainly, this is what appears to have happened at first, when the Canadian Prime Minister, Arthur Meighen, arrived to fight against any alliance which excluded the United States. He returned home assuming he had

reversed the thinking of the Foreign Office and ensured the participation of the United States. When the appropriate government documents⁵⁰ were released many years later, this assumption was shown to be incorrect since the Foreign Office reversed its decision, not so much because of Meighen's representations, but because of the realisation that the United States Government was annoyed by the alliance and objected strongly to its exclusion from discussions on renewal of the alliance. Many British officials, including the Foreign Office, changed their views primarily because they could not afford to alienate their American allies.⁵¹

A new light is cast upon the Imperial Conference of 1921 through understanding why the Foreign Office changed its mind regarding the United States Government and efforts to renew the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The truth behind the Foreign Office's transformation of opinion undermines any suggestion that Canada, or any other Dominion, had a noteworthy impact upon the formulation of imperial foreign policy. The issue of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance highlights the continuation of the practice of foreign policy being conducted solely by the Foreign Office. The lack of Dominion impact, especially in this instance the dissenting voice of Canada because of her crucial American relations, and most strikingly the failure of Canada to realise that the failure to renew the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was not a testament to how much her relationship with Britain had developed, but an example of how little it had changed. The return of Meighen to Canada with the notion that he had effected a change in imperial foreign policy erected yet another barrier of misunderstanding between Canada and Britain in foreign policy.

The determination of the Canadian Government that the United States should not be alienated in this matter caused the new Canadian Prime Minister, Arthur Meighen, to assume the unnatural role of agitator. Until the issue of the alliance arose, Meighen had maintained a low profile on the imperial scene. When he arrived in Britain for the Imperial Conference of 1921, he remained an unfamiliar quantity for the British and indeed remains a relatively obscure figure in Canadian and imperial political history. Part of his relative obscurity, certainly in the imperial arena, arose from his short term in office. He succeeded Borden as Conservative leader and Prime Minister in 1920, but his tenure lasted just over a year. His brief term was occupied primarily with domestic problems, not the least of which was trying to hold together a coalition government created by Borden during the war and sustained mainly by Borden's personality. Borden, writing to the British Ambassador in Washington, Sir Auckland Geddes, assessed his successor as 'a man of brilliant parts, still in the prime of his life, endowed with a strong constitution and great capacity for work. He is a powerful debater and possesses great courage and strong convictions.'⁵² Meighen's difficulty was that although he possessed all the right qualities, something went wrong when they came together, and he never excelled as a political leader.

There is no indication that British politicians realised Meighen's shortcomings. In British governmental circles, he remained an elusive figure with an unclear political agenda. The Duke of Devonshire, Governor General of Canada, reported to the Colonial Office on one of Meighen's first speeches as Prime Minister that instead of making a 'reasonably definite

declaration as to the policy of his new Government', he eulogised the late government.⁵³ Meighen, for his part, made few pronouncements on imperial relations, but when he did he betrayed a 'limited personal commitment to the new system of external relations with which Borden's name was associated.'⁵⁴ Initially, what little the Colonial Office did know about Meighen's imperial agenda seemed no reason for concern. Relief primarily prevailed as Meighen appeared content with the present imperial structure. In November 1920, in Toronto, Meighen delivered a speech which touched on his imperial views. A copy of the speech was forwarded by Devonshire and although no comments were recorded in the Colonial Office, one official highlighted the following passage:

Our place [said Meighen] in the family of nations is what at the present moment we want it to be. It suits the measure of our development as a British Dominion. It meets the aspirations of all who love the Empire of which we are a part and see in it the world's best hope. That means it accords with the desire of an overwhelming majority of the Canadian people. We have the right of a full-stature nation within the British Empire, and that is the best lot I know of. We have a distinct voice in the League of Nations comporting with our individuality as a nation and our importance as a country...Our share in the relations of the British Empire to the rest of the world and our responsibility as such will be as time goes on more and more clearly recognized and defined.⁵⁵

It is against this outlook that Meighen's actions in the Anglo-Japanese alliance are so infused with meaning because, strong as his imperial links were, he was not willing to jeopardise Canadian-American relations.

Britain's decision to consult with the Dominions on renewing the alliance was hailed by the British press as an

example of the new imperial relationship whereby the British Government would act only after discussions with the Dominions. One editorial praised arrangements when now, 'For the first time the Empire in conference will be called upon to decide the foreign policy of the Empire as a whole.'⁵⁶ To outward appearances, the consciousness that a decision over foreign policy had to be made in partnership with the Dominions seemed to have been realised in British governmental circles. An internal Foreign Office committee on the alliance affirmed in January 1921 the obligation to consult the Dominions before a final decision was reached.⁵⁷ Other documents of the Foreign Office and Colonial Office also provide evidence of this new component of consultation, but equally apparent is how little impact Dominion opinion had for most of the time.

The uncertain degree of Dominion impact was highlighted by Canada's strong opposition to renewal of the alliance because of the potential ramifications for Canada's relations with the United States. This stance was enunciated by Canada early in the months leading up to the Imperial Conference of 1921. In mid-February 1921, Meighen wrote to Lloyd George requesting an alternative to renewal in order to promote good relations with the United States. The Canadian Prime Minister also proposed that Borden be sent to Washington to solicit views of the American President and his Secretary of State.⁵⁸ The suggestion reflected the Canadian view that Canada could act effectively as a mediator. Initially, Churchill and the Colonial Office had no objection to such a mission by Borden and went so far as to prepare the draft response to Canada accepting the offer.⁵⁹ Before it could be sent, Churchill met

with Lloyd George and Curzon at 10 Downing Street. The outcome of the meeting was a firm rejection on the grounds that Britain could not permit any action which might limit the options of the British Cabinet and other Dominions. In an attempt to pacify Canada, Borden was invited to Britain to discuss the matter further.⁶⁰ In Canada, the rejection was judged harshly by some in the Canadian Government as an indicator which showed how little Britain appreciated Canada's interest in good relations with the United States. Loring Christie noted in a memorandum to Meighen on the British response that, 'Canada's interest, as the next door neighbour of the United States, is overwhelming as compared with that of Great Britain or of any part of the Empire; and her knowledge and qualifications for dealing with the Americans are by the same token superior to those of other parts of the Empire and should be called into play.' Christie concluded that the rejection of a mission by Borden would mean the loss of 'great advantages' in resolving the matter.⁶¹ Indignant though the Canadian Government may have felt, five weeks elapsed before a response was sent. Again, Canada urged that an alternative to the alliance should be sought and that the special opportunity of understanding the perspective of the United States, afforded by Canada's close association, be fully utilised.⁶² The Foreign Office remained firm that Borden should not go to Washington, revealing concern that this might encourage a movement in the United States, led by Senator Lodge, to shift the leadership of English-speaking communities from London to Washington. One official in the Office did admit that Canada was the best suited to sound out the

Americans, if the need ever arose.⁶³ Such an admission was a rare occurrence.

Meighen was set for a showdown at the Imperial Conference of 1921. The British were prepared for this and suspected that since Meighen was 'a good deal under Christie's influence', he would be 'really voicing Christie's views.'⁶⁴ Meighen was not alone among Dominion leaders at the Conference in his opposition to renewal of the alliance. Billy Hughes, the Prime Minister of Australia, was also opposed but he came into direct confrontation with Meighen because he wanted guarantees since the collapse of the alliance would leave Australia exposed to potential aggression from Japan. The conference also revealed that British opinion had undergone changes. Within Whitehall there had never existed wholehearted agreement that the accord should be renewed. A strong faction, gaining support, advocated a new agreement which would embrace the United States. Lloyd George had advocated working with the United States in the matter as early as 1920⁶⁵, and by April 1921 the internal committee of the Foreign Office on the alliance threw its weight behind a three-party agreement which would include the United States.⁶⁶ It was these forces within Britain which stressed the relationship with the United States that did more to thwart efforts to renew the alliance than the protests originating in the Dominions.

The Imperial Conference of 1921 did not match the build-up that it was given. Indeed, it was an anti-climax, both in the matter of the alliance and in the overall advancement of the consultation of Dominions in foreign affairs. While Curzon made an impressive summary of foreign issues, the

actual test of Dominion involvement through the example of discussing the alliance proved a dismal failure. The question lost most of its momentum when Lloyd George, displaying political skill, brought forward an opinion from the law officers that it had been wrongly assumed that the alliance would automatically terminate in three months. Rather, they concluded that the agreement would continue until either Britain or Japan formally terminated it.⁶⁷ This clever performance, of which Lloyd George was especially proud⁶⁸, immediately dissipated the intensity of the issue by removing the time-constraint, and this effectively ended debate of the matter. A series of British Cabinet discussions, which occurred concurrently with the Imperial Conference, resulted in the British shifting their priority to attempting to secure a conference, which would include the participation of the United States, China as well as Japan, and to placing second the option of resolving the alliance exclusively between Britain and Japan. Thus, although the matter was not settled at the Imperial Conference, at least the Dominion leaders left with the sense that they had accomplished something constructive. Meighen and Christie were particularly pleased that the United States would now have the opportunity to participate in the process. Unfortunately, both Meighen and Christie, and indeed the press corps, over-estimated the impact of Canada and other Dominions in redirecting imperial foreign policy. Worse still was the over-estimation, as became evident later, of the Dominions' role in the formulation of foreign policy.

Canada's participation in the alliance question essentially ended with the Imperial Conference. After the

departure of the Dominions' leaders, the Foreign Office began to sound out the United States, Japan and China about participating in a conference to discuss the Pacific question. The countries' agreement surprised the Foreign Office. The countries also concurred that the conference meet in Washington through the autumn and winter of 1921-22. This decision contradicted the original British wish to meet in London. The Washington Conference reached an agreement on a ten-year building 'holiday' on battleships, which was signed by the United States, the British Empire, Japan, France and Italy. It also agreed that a four-party treaty, with United States, China, Japan and the British Empire, would be negotiated outside the Washington Conference. In April 1923, this four-power treaty replaced the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.⁶⁹

The Dominions were allowed to participate in the Washington Conference under the same system as that used for the Paris Peace negotiations, the British Empire Delegation. Canada found no fault with the B.E.D. and chose Borden to represent the country. The Dominion representatives had little if any impact on the negotiations, as their sessions were chiefly an opportunity for Balfour, who headed the delegation, to report on progress. The Dominions' acceptance of these arrangements, however, bolstered the British belief that the B.E.D. was the structure upon which future consultation with the Dominions could be adequately based.⁷⁰

The North Atlantic Triangle: British Understanding

One of the more revealing aspects of the circumstances surrounding the Anglo-Japanese Alliance is the insight it offers into the relations among Britain, the United States and Canada, frequently referred to as the North Atlantic triangle. Good relations with the United States had been an established priority for British foreign policy before World War One, but it became even more crucial in the post-war period. Equally for Canada, the maintenance of a good understanding with its neighbour south of the border was the first and most central consideration in its external relations. Given their mutual interests, one might expect that if circumstances were conducive to Britain and Canada working in partnership, then this would have been pursued. It was a partnership that Canada desired because it had long envisioned one of its most natural positions as the intermediary between Britain and the United States. It was a role that Canada actively attempted to press on Britain only to be rebuffed. The issue of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance occasioned another rebuff to Canada, and this is particularly poignant since it occurred in the supposedly new atmosphere in which foreign policy was seen as a collective effort and which took into account the interests of the Dominions and Britain. No other Dominion could claim the same degree of concern with the United States as Canada, and yet the disregard Britain showed for Canadian interests and participation highlighted the inequality in their relationship. Had Canada known of the indifference on Britain's part, the issue would have threatened or even damaged imperial unity in foreign policy by shattering the Canadian belief that it had a voice in policy-making. It was

Canadian ignorance of British attitudes which saved imperial unity from injury. British decision-makers were of course not uninformed about the high priority which Canada gave to her dealings with the United States. They had seen that in 1919 when Borden requested an extension of the practice, whereby the British Embassy in Washington forwarded to Ottawa any despatches of interest to Canada.⁷¹ The Foreign Office agreed to this. Conscious that Canada would be pressing for a representative in Washington, the Foreign Office decided that this offer might go a long way to securing close links between the Canadian and British representatives and thus increase the likelihood of achieving 'real cooperation' at a later date. The concession was not so much an acknowledgement of the value of Canadian-American relations as an effort to preserve imperial diplomatic unity.⁷² Canadian actions, whether requesting more despatches or opposing the use of the name British Empire Delegation because the United States might interpret it as proof that Britain in reality had six votes in the League of Nations⁷³, could not but reinforce the need for good relations with the United States. In Whitehall, however, and most noticeably in the Foreign Office, Canada's American interests were largely overlooked because they were not regarded as a threat to imperial unity.

Sir Auckland Geddes, the British Ambassador at Washington, entertained grave concern about the deepening cultural, economic and political ties between Canada and the United States, and the threat they posed for the Empire. He was convinced that the United States was actively pursuing a policy which would ally Canada with it and against the British Empire. Geddes wrote to Curzon in December 1920 of his belief

that the United States intended to take advantage of the apparent chaos within the British Empire to re-align Canada, Australia, and New Zealand and thus to assume the position of the leading nation in the world and leader among the English-speaking nations. He feared that Britain was committing a grave error if it overlooked this threat and failed to counter the United States' success with Canada by consciously building a stronger British base in Canada. He concluded his letter with a plea to Curzon, 'You may think this all very extravagant...but I think that it would be a mistake to ignore it.'⁷⁴

Unfortunately, Geddes' warning fell on deaf ears, partly because he commanded no respect from Curzon, who considered him an 'unsuccessful representative' and was anxious to retire him not only from Washington but from the diplomatic corps altogether⁷⁵, but mainly because most officials in the Foreign Office had not experienced at first hand the kinship between Canada and the United States and therefore under-estimated its strength. It certainly created an interesting division in British governing circles, between those who had either travelled to Canada or worked in the Embassy in Washington, or even the Governors General, who had experienced at first hand the close links, and those who had no such experience. Generally, the former group held the same views as the latter until they came into actual contact with the daily dealings between Canada and the United States and then they were shocked, almost to the point of panic, that the kinship between the two countries was stronger than that between Britain and Canada. It was this kinship, they feared, that would be the greatest threat to imperial unity and one about

which Britain could not afford to be passive. Unfortunately, the majority of British decision-makers lacked this close contact and personal knowledge, so that they under-estimated the centrality of the United States in the decision-making process of the Canadian Government. Even the events of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance did not heighten British understanding, and the British continued to delude themselves further about the American threat to relations with Canada. Few imperial illusions, however, were to survive the Chanak Crisis which erupted in the autumn of 1922.

The Chanak Crisis: The Shattering of Illusions

In the late summer and early autumn of 1922, the British Empire was confronted with a military crisis in the Near East as Turkish nationalists posed a threat to Greek holdings in the region. Although the military consequences of the incident fizzled as quickly as the crisis, the political ramifications made it a watershed in imperial relations. The Lloyd George Coalition was one of the political victims of the débâcle. The coalition collapsed mainly over its handling of the affair. The crisis also shattered any illusions held by the Dominions regarding the advancement of their role in foreign policy. The emergency revealed not only the failure of consultation, but even more basically, how little had changed when the British Empire could be brought to the brink of war by the action of the British Cabinet alone.

The Chanak Crisis erupted suddenly late in the summer of 1922 when Turkish nationalists appeared prepared to use military force against the Greeks to reclaim possessions they believed rightly theirs. Conflicts in the region stemmed from

the terms of the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres which partitioned Turkish Asia Minor; a section of the territory concentrating on Smyrna was given to Greece. Also under the terms of the treaty, a British garrison was posted at Chanak to ensure that the passageway, which was crucial to British interests in the region, remained open. The continuing saga of struggle between Turkey and Greece took on a new dimension in 1921-22, when the Sultan of Turkey was replaced by a revolutionary nationalist government headed by Mustafa Kemal. The nationalist government immediately repudiated the treaty and in the summer of 1922 launched a series of military attacks to reclaim territories from Greek possession. Kemal's army was highly successful and by early September it occupied Smyrna. British forces were under-manned and gravely exposed, especially in Chanak and the Dardanelles, as they faced Kemal's powerful army. Lloyd George and other ministers, spurred in part by their pro-Greek leanings, concluded that the only response was an impressive display of force.

On Friday, September 15, the British Cabinet resolved to reinforce the troops in the region. On Saturday at Chequers, a select group of British ministers, which included Churchill but not Curzon, decided to issue a forceful statement that Britain would stand its ground and defend the neutral zone. The imperial element entered when a press-release on the crisis became a plea that the Dominions send contingents to the area. Unfortunately, due primarily to carelessness on the part of Churchill, before the Dominion Governments could be informed of the request, the news was released by the press. The Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, whose Liberal party had defeated Meighen's Conservative Government in 1921,

found out about unfolding events only when questioned by reporters.⁷⁶

The main reason that King did not receive a copy of the telegram, sent from Britain before the press release, was that it was sent on the weekend and thus incurred a series of ciphering delays.⁷⁷ King was highly indignant by the casual treatment from Britain, not only in the failure to relay this information before the press received it, but also by not keeping Canada informed in the Near East. King decided to employ the tactic, which he was to use frequently in foreign matters, of inaction. He refused to send a contingent of troops, despite outcries for military support for Britain within Canada, on the grounds that such a step had to be sanctioned by the Canadian Parliament.⁷⁸ He was not willing, moreover, to re-call the Parliament during the recess until he was convinced that this was necessary. Of the other Dominions, only New Zealand pledged troops outright, while Australia did so later only after having made its displeasure clear about the manner in which it had been consulted. South Africa took no stand on the affair.

King's refusal to send troops at Britain's request marked a substantial departure from previous imperial policy, and thereby breached imperial unity. Events over Chanak alerted to him the fact that despite all the outward signs of change, imperial foreign policy, to which Canada was being committed, continued to be formulated by Britain with little or no input from the Dominion. This realisation spurred him to challenge, and eventually free Canada from imperial foreign policy.⁷⁹

The Chanak Crisis brought questioning of the imperial relationship back to centre stage for the Canadians. It did

not have the same effect in Britain. British politicians and officials initially contemplated its impact on imperial unity. This attention lapsed, however, once the crisis shook British domestic politics. The crisis finally subsided when the Turks did not attack Chanak and an armistice was signed in early October. Lloyd George and his ministry, however, still attracted sharp criticism for their handling of the affair. The ministry collapsed when the Conservatives withdrew their support. Andrew Bonar Law, a Conservative, succeeded Lloyd George in 10 Downing Street on 19 October 1922.⁸⁰

The crisis is in one sense an appropriate end to the first four post-war years of imperial relations. Anglo-Canadian relationships failed to meet the expectations of progress anticipated under the Lloyd George Coalition, and worse, had failed to sustain even the status quo on constitutional advances made during the First World War and the subsequent Peace Conference. Under the Lloyd George Coalition there was a reversion to the practice that the Foreign Office was the sole agency in handling issues in foreign affairs. The Foreign Office, although not ignorant that it was now expected to consult with the Dominions in foreign policy, chose to maintain its role as the sole practitioner of foreign policy until challenged to do otherwise. The Foreign Office was able to hide behind several excuses which permitted officials to conduct imperial foreign affairs as they always had. The most frequent plea was the lack of a mechanism to enable them to consult properly with the Dominions on foreign matters, which demanded more than just a periodic meeting, and so they had often to make daily

decisions without consulting the Dominions. As for the establishment of a mechanism which would allow proper consultation, the Foreign Office believed that it was the task of the Colonial Office to rally the opinions of the Dominions. Unfortunately for the Dominions, the Colonial Office did not assume the burden of devising a proper mechanism for consultation. This passive approach was further encouraged by the lack of initiative from Canada, or any other Dominion, demanding a voice in the conduct of foreign affairs. Canadian politicians did not give much attention to the actual implementation of constitutional evolution in foreign affairs. Under both Borden and Meighen an illusion persisted that Canadian interests were receiving adequate attention in foreign policy, as demonstrated in the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and, as will be seen, in the question of Canadian representation at Washington. The illusion collapsed, as did the Lloyd George Coalition, with the Chanak Crisis. The crisis made the conduct of imperial foreign policy a matter of priority for the Canadian Government, under the leadership of Mackenzie King, after a hiatus of several years. King became determined to challenge and break up imperial foreign policy. While it was Chanak that unleashed King on his crusade against imperial unity, the impact of the crisis on imperial relations was not grasped by most British politicians and this contributed to their failure to keep pace with and check the Canadian timetable for abandoning a unified imperial foreign policy.

1. A.M. Gollin, Proconsul in Politics, London, 1964, p. 584.
2. A. Burt, The British Empire and the Commonwealth, Boston, 1956, p. 731.
3. Terrence O'Brien, Milner, London, 1979, pp. 19-43.
4. O'Brien, Milner, p.31.
5. Amery Papers, the original diaries of L.S. Amery, 9 July 1919. Although these diaries have been edited and published by John Barnes and David Nicholson, The Leo Amery Diaries, 2 volumes, (London, 1980 and 1988), much of my material was either excluded or abridged. Hereafter, diary material not published will be cited as Amery Diaries, while published material will be cited as Barnes and Nicholson.
6. While at Oxford, Milner met George Parkin, a Canadian from New Brunswick and author of Imperial Federation, who is said to have made a keen impression on Milner, Churchill and Amery, while the latter two were still at Harrow. A.M. Gollin, Proconsul in Politics, pp. 16-17.
7. Alfred Milner, The British Commonwealth, London, 1919, p.5.
8. Milner Papers, 464, f. 5.
9. Milner Papers, Additional Papers, c.690, ff.187-191, Edward Grigg to Milner, 1 August 1919. In his letter, Grigg wrote of the success of the B.E.D. in achieving consultation while maintaining a unified voice and added that 'the same method, developed and perfected as circumstances require, will be essential to the future...of the Commonwealth.' Beside this point Milner wrote, 'That is the whole point.'
10. Gollin, Proconsul in Politics, p. 584; O'Brien, Milner, pp. 329-59; J. Barnes and D. Nicholson, eds., The Leo Amery Diaries, vol. 1, pp. 244-246.
11. Gollin, Proconsul in Politics, p. 584; O'Brien, Milner, pp. 329-59.
12. Milner Papers, Additional Papers, c.691, ff. 87-89, Milner to Forster, 26 December 1920.
13. Milner Papers, 48(1), ff. 10a-10b, Milner to Lord Stamfordham, 5 January 1921.
14. Milner Papers, Additional Papers, c.703, ff. 46-7, Milner to Amery, 17 January 1920.
15. Milner Papers, Additional Papers, c.703, ff. 18-22, Milner to Amery, 30 December 1919. Amery Diaries, 11 January 1919, Amery wrote that Milner instructed him, on leaving him in charge of the Colonial Office, 'learn to swim for myself but not to try and reform things in too much of a hurry.'
16. Milner Papers, Additional Papers, c.703, ff. 18-22.

17. Amery Diaries, 24 October 1919.

18. R. Graham, Meighen, vol. I: The Door of Opportunity, Toronto, 1960, p. 288.

19. Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, pp. 98-104.

20. Milner Papers, Additional Papers, c.703, f. 74, Milner to Thorton, 17 January 1920.

21. Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, pp. 98-104.

22. Milner Papers, Additional Papers, c.700, ff. 275-82, Milner to Meighen, 4 October 1920.

23. Milner Papers, Additional Papers, c.700, ff. 275-282, Milner to Meighen, 4 October 1920.

24. Amery Diaries, 9 July 1919; Gollin, Proconsul in Politics, pp. 16-17; Milner, The British Commonwealth, p. 5; Milner Papers, 464, f. 5.

25. Churchill College, (Cambridge), Hankey Papers, (hereafter Hankey Papers), Hankey Diaries, HNKY 1/7, 22 March 1925.

26. W.N. Medlicott, Contemporary England: 1914-1964, London, 1967, p. 184-5.

27. Kenneth O. Morgan, The Age of Lloyd George, London, 1971, p.87.

28. PRO, FO 371/5684, A1187/1187/45, minute by E.A. Crowe, 4 March 1921.

29. PRO, FO 371/4580, A4384/4384/850, minute by H.J. Seymour, 7 July 1920.

30. PRO, FO 371/5684, A1187/1187/45, minute by E.A. Crowe, 4 March 1921.

31. PRO, FO 371/5684, A2349/1187/45, Reading, CO to Curzon, 4 April 1921.

32. PRO, FO 371/7025, W8445/8445/50, M. Hankey to E.A. Crowe, 5 August 1921. Minute by Crowe, 10 August 1921.

33. Milner Papers, Additional Papers, c.700, ff. 275-82, Milner to Meighen, 4 October 1920.

34. PRO, FO 371/4580, A4180/4180/850, minute by H.J. Seymour, 29 June 1920, regarding a new shipping bill in the United States and need to respond without consulting the Dominions, 'The Colonial Office has been kept informed but it generally takes several months to arrange for united action on the part of the Dominions.'

35. PRO, FO 371/5700, A3761/3761/45, minutes regarding the draft of an agreement between Canada and the United States on pollution of water, 1921; FO 371/7251, A2556/2556/45, correspondence between Britain and Canada regarding the publication of documents on the Washington Conference, 1921.

36. PRO, FO 371/7021, W2702/2702/50, memorandum by the Colonial Office entitled, 'A Common Imperial Foreign Policy in Foreign Affairs', March 1921.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. PRO, FO 371/7021, W2702/2702/50, memorandum by the Colonial Office entitled, 'A Common Imperial Foreign Policy In Foreign Affairs', March 1921. Minute by E.A. Crowe, 10 March 1921. Crowe's minute was approved by Curzon.

40. PRO, FO 371/7251, A2556/2556/45, minute by R.S. Sperling, 19 April 1922.

41. Brown and Cook, Canada 1896-1921, pp. 275-320.

42. Milner Papers, 90, Milner Diary, 8 January 1919. Milner noted in his diary he had had to push for Amery as his Under-Secretary against the opposition of Bonar Law and Lloyd George.

43. Martin Gilbert, World in Torment: Winston S. Churchill, 1917-1922, London, paperback edition, 1990, p. 520. Milner to Sir Herbert Samuel, High Commissioner in Palestine, 5 February 1921, taken from Samuel Papers.

44. Gilbert, World in Torment: Winston S. Churchill, 1917-1922, p. 509, Churchill to Lloyd George, 4 January 1921. Taken from the Lloyd George Papers. Hankey made specific reference that it was the intention of Churchill to fight the Foreign Office and have the mandated territories brought under the jurisdiction of the Colonial Office. Hankey Papers, vol. 1/5, diary entry, 7 January 1921.

45. Barnes and Nicholson, eds., Amery Diaries, vol. 1, London, 1980, p.261, Amery to his wife, 28 June 1919.

46. PRO, specifically, reference is taken from the Colonial Office series, CO 532, Dominion correspondence.

47. Lloyd George Papers, F/9/3/65, Churchill to Lloyd George, 8 July 1921.

48. National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, (hereafter referred to as NAC) King Papers, C2246, pp.64273-4, Larkin to King, 5 April 1922.

49. NAC, Department of External Affairs, RG 25/1270/680, memorandum by Loring Christie, 'The Anglo-Japanese Alliance', 5 March 1921. A full account of the Anglo-Japanese alliance from 1911 until its replacement by a four-power treaty in 1923

can be found in Ian H. Nish, Alliance in Decline: A Study in Anglo-Japanese Relations 1908-23, London, 1972.

50. Nish, Alliance in Decline, pp. 351-53; Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, pp. 129-144.

51. Nish, Alliance in Decline, pp. 351-53.

52. NAC, Borden Papers, C4344, p. 65416, Borden to Geddes, 8 July 1920.

53. PRO, CO 42/1020/43516, Devonshire to Milner, 17 August 1920.

54. Graham, Arthur Meighen, vol. 1, p. 288.

55. PRO, CO 42/1022/59767, Devonshire to Colonial Office, 24 November 1920, taken from The Toronto Globe, 20 November 1920. A fuller text of the speech can be found in Walter A. Riddell, ed., Documents on Canadian Foreign Policy: 1917-1939, Ottawa, 1962, p. 60.

56. Daily Mail, 25 February 1921. An editorial in The Times, 6 March 1921, also believed the Imperial Conference set for the summer of 1921 would have the final decision on the alliance and confirmed the new relationship between Britain and her Dominions.

57. PRO, FO 371/6672, F1057/63/23, minute by V. Wellesley, 21 January 1921.

58. PRO, CO 42/1032/7503, Devonshire to Churchill, 15 February 1921, forwarding a letter from A. Meighen to Lloyd George.

59. PRO, CO 42/1033/15957, Churchill to Lloyd George, 1 April 1921.

60. PRO, FO 371/6672, F1578/63/23, Churchill to Devonshire, 22 February 1921.

61. NAC, Department of External Affairs, RG 25/1270/680, memorandum by L. Christie, 'The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: Notes on Mr. Lloyd George's telegram of 26 February 1921'.

62. PRO, FO 371/6672, F1578/63/23, Devonshire to Churchill, 1 April 1921.

63. PRO, FO 371/6672, F1579/63/23, minute by W. Tyrrell, 8 April 1921.

64. Lloyd George Papers, F25/1/41, Hankey to Lloyd George, 15 June 1921.

65. Lloyd George Papers, F/13/1/20, Curzon to Lloyd George, 25 September 1920.

66. PRO, FO 371/6672, F1168/63/23, 'Report of Anglo-Japanese Alliance Committee', 1 April 1921.

67. British Parliamentary Sessional Papers, vol. XIV, Cmd. 1474.

68. Lord Beaverbrook, Decline and Fall of Lloyd George, London, 1963, pp. 80-81.

69. Nish, Alliance in Decline, pp. 354-82.

70. Hankey Papers, HNKY 8/22, Hankey to Lloyd George, 17 November 1921.

71. Lloyd George Papers, F/5/3/25, Borden to Lloyd George, 27 March 1919.

72. PRO, FO 371/4249, A56177/3896/45, Borden to Lloyd George, 27 March 1919. Borden's request regarding telegrams was approved by the Foreign Office. FO 371/4249, A64307/3896/45, minute by R.S. Sperling, 30 April 1919.

73. Hankey Papers, HNKY 1/5, diary entry 13 November 1920.

74. India Office, London, Curzon Papers, (hereafter Curzon Papers), MSS Eur.F 112/206, Geddes to Curzon, 13 December 1920. Sir A. Geddes sent a much fuller account of his concerns to Phillip Kerr, Geddes to Kerr, 3 January 1921, also in the Curzon Papers. Geddes returned to this theme that the United States was actively attempting to divide and rule in Anglo-Canadian relations in the his Annual Report of 1920, FO 371/5713, A7058/7058/7058. He had no more success in 1921 than he had in 1920.

75. Lloyd George Papers, F/13/2/42, Curzon to Lloyd George, 28 August 1921. Curzon expressed his desire that Geddes should be replaced and went further to suggest that perhaps Milner could be enticed to go to Washington.

76. NAC, Mackenzie King Diaries, (microfiche), (hereafter referred to as King Diaries), 16 September 1922.

77. NAC, King Diaries, 17 September 1922.

78. NAC, King Diaries, 18 September 1922.

79. NAC, King Diaries, 1921-1922. The King Diaries reveal a striking absence of comment regarding formulation of imperial foreign policy during the first ten months of King's premiership. All this changed with the Chanak Crisis as contemplation of imperial foreign policy and its implications for Canada became of regular theme in the diary entries.

80. James Eayrs, In Defence of Canada: From the Great War to the Great Depression, Toronto, 1964, pp. 20-25; C.P. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 2, 1981, pp. 17-31; J.H. Thompson with A. Seager, Canada 1922-1939, Toronto, 1985, pp. 43-47.

CHAPTER 3

CANADIAN REPRESENTATION AT WASHINGTON: 1919-1926

Although the years 1919-1922 lacked the same vigorous initiative for change from Canada as occurred between 1916-18, Borden obtained in 1920 the right for Canada to place its own representative at Washington. The issue of Dominion representation in a foreign capital was the beginning of the final phase which dismantled imperial unity. Canada did not make an appointment until 1926 and with numerous alterations in the terms of the appointment. The struggle between Canada and Britain regarding Canadian representation spanned the entire era when British-Canadian relations were being redefined. The process of resolving the issue was influenced by the developments in Anglo-Canadian relations.

In the autumn of 1919, the Canadian Government asked Britain for separate representation at Washington. This request directly challenged imperial diplomatic unity and therefore held great significance to both the British and Canadian Governments. The Canadians regarded the appointment as the logical step toward equality with Britain. The British, conversely, saw it as a challenge to imperial diplomatic unity, the last crucial link which bound the British Empire together. It was a complex issue which remained unresolved for seven years until the appointment of Vincent Massey in 1926 as Canada's first separate representative at Washington.¹

Discussions regarding representation went through several stages as the British perspective changed concerning its relations with Canada. At each of these critical stages, the

issue grew more complex as the result of confrontations over policy within Whitehall. The Colonial Office and Foreign Office, to whom the matter was entrusted, rarely agreed. The search for a consensus over this issue was not easy. Such difficulties, together with the evolution of British imperial opinion, form an essential component in the study of Canadian representation at Washington.

Origins: 1909-1919

As early as 1909, when the Canadian Department of External Affairs was established, one member of the Canadian Parliament suggested that a Canadian representative be posted to Washington. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, then Prime Minister, rejected the proposal as 'uncongenial'². Perhaps Laurier found the request ahead of its time, but his remark reflects his intermittent interest in foreign policy. He was content with the current conduct of Canadian-American relations.³ The matter remained dormant until Laurier's successor, Robert Borden, and the Conservative Party, came to power in 1911.

One early decision of the new Conservative Government was to return the Department of External Affairs to the direct control of the Prime Minister. This action quickly established Borden's desire to be a more active player than his predecessor in Canadian foreign relations.⁴ Among the various foreign affairs which attracted Borden during his prime ministership, the issue of representation at Washington was one which he returned to time and again⁵. Practical reasons drove him on this issue. The British Embassy at Washington dealt with a broad spectrum of matters directly related to Canada such as trade, customs, and tariffs. In

1912, James Bryce, British Ambassador to Washington, estimated that three-quarters of the business of the British Embassy was in fact Canadian.⁶ The entry of the United States into the Great War in 1917 enabled the Canadian Government to lay the ground for its future request for Canadian representation. The British allowed a Canadian War Mission at Washington. This mission became a vital precedent in achieving more permanent representation.

After the war, ratification of the Treaty of Versailles consumed Borden's energies until the autumn of 1919. Once that matter was settled, he returned with renewed determination to the question of Canadian representation in Washington. Inspired by the enhanced stature that the Dominions had gained in the course of the First World War, Borden now regarded such representation as 'the logical capstone of the quest for Dominion autonomy which...began with Resolution IX of the 1917 Imperial War Conference.'⁷

The Agreement of 1920:

On 3 October 1919, the 9th Duke of Devonshire, Governor General of Canada, writing on behalf of his Prime Minister, sent a formal request to the Colonial Office for the appointment of a Canadian representative at the British Embassy in Washington. Drawing heavily upon the content of Resolution IX of 1917⁸, Devonshire argued that the large number of questions involving purely Canadian concerns required that 'effective steps should be taken to safeguard more thoroughly Canadian interests at Washington.'⁹ The British Government now faced its first challenge in the new environment brought about by the Great War. The significance

of the matter was clear to L.S. Amery, Under-Secretary for the Colonies who concluded that it was 'a crucial decision in Imperial policy.' Privately, no doubt, some shared the sentiment of G.V. Fiddes, a Colonial Office official, who questioned whether all Canadians, as distinct from the Borden Government, desired representation.¹⁰ Any reservations, however, were overruled by British recognition that Britain had to honour the Canadian Government's request. Although displeased with the proposal, Whitehall knew that it was powerless to block it if Canada insisted because of the Dominion's new status. Even the Colonial Office official who described the Canadian action as separatist conceded that, 'Of course if Canada sufficiently desires anything she will get it up to separation inclusively.'¹¹ Determined not to stand passively by, the Colonial Office entered willingly into a game of bluff with Canada. The Colonial Office decided if concessions were granted slowly and reluctantly, then Canada might be stopped just short of destroying imperial unity. The question for the Colonial Office became one of drafting a counter-proposal which would maintain the integrity of the Empire, and yet still satisfy the Canadians.

With this aim in view, Amery presented a plan on 7 October 1919 which led to the Colonial Office's counter-offer. His plan recommended the division of the Embassy in Washington into two sections: one section dealing with purely Canadian matters manned by an all Canadian staff; the other section handling all other matters.¹² Another aspect of Amery's scheme was a recommendation that the next Ambassador should be a Canadian.¹³

Amery believed he could market the proposal to the

Canadian Government by exploiting the wording of the Canadian request. In its original telegram, the Canadian Government petitioned that its mission 'constitute a part of the establishment of His Majesty's Government'. Amery's plan, he argued, fulfilled the Canadian wish and it prevented the weakening of a joint imperial foreign policy. As an enticement, he intended to add that the measures were purely temporary until the Constitutional Conference, promised in 1917, was convened.¹⁴ Conscious that imperial diplomatic unity was at the mercy of the Canadians, Amery was not optimistic that his counter-proposal would be accepted. He was determined, however, to pursue attempts to limit the Dominion's gains at the expense of imperial unity. 'If Canada still disagrees we shall have to give way, and see what can be done to retrieve the position hereafter.'¹⁵ Amery's proposal for representation required the approval of the Foreign Office before it could be sent to Canada. The Foreign Office, however, held strong views on the matter.

The Foreign Office and the Colonial Office responded similarly to the Canadian request for representation at Washington. They feared the threat it posed to imperial diplomatic unity. They realised that they had to accede, but hoped that a counter-offer would lessen the ramifications of the Canadian request. The Foreign Office and the Colonial Office agreed on the need of a counter-offer. They did not, however, agree on its contents. The difference on substance brought the two departments into conflict. When the struggle was resolved and a counter-offer sent, the Foreign Office's opinions prevailed. It was the first time, but hardly the last, when the Foreign Office directed developments in

Britain's relations with Canada. The Foreign Office's main advantage was that it was far more prepared on the question than the Colonial Office.

The Foreign Office had heard of a possible Canadian request as early as six months prior and this allowed time for preparation. It also permitted time for misunderstanding and resentment to grow within the department against the Colonial Office. Relations between the two departments on Canadian representation began badly when the Foreign Office first heard of the matter in late April, 1919, through Parliamentary Questions in the British House of Commons.¹⁶ The Foreign Office's immediate response was to enquire why it had not been informed by the Colonial Office. One Foreign Office official noted: 'It seems strange we have not been consulted,' but concluded that, 'perhaps Colonial Office are waiting first for a definite proposal to be put forward.'¹⁷ The Foreign Office was correct here as they had not heard directly from the Canadian Government. The Foreign Office decided to press the Colonial Office for information, and in late May Lord Milner, Secretary of State for the Colonies, wrote to Devonshire to complain that he was still waiting for a report from the Governor General on the matter.¹⁸ The Colonial Office was content to leave the matter until the Canadian Government approached them. This stance dissatisfied the Foreign Office and in the summer of 1919 several letters were sent to the Colonial Office stressing they expected Lord Curzon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, would 'be consulted as to any decision to be taken on this matter.'¹⁹ The silence of the Colonial Office only increased ill-feeling in the Foreign Office²⁰, until the latter was forced into independent action.

Throughout the summer of 1919, high-ranking Foreign Office officials prepared an internal memorandum on the implications of Canadian representation at Washington. They concluded, as the Colonial Office would in late October, that such a step would undermine and destroy the last vestige of British imperial foreign policy. Foreign Office officials found it a contradiction to suggest that independent representation could be granted without undermining the principle of a unified foreign policy. Canadian diplomatic representation at Washington would force the Foreign Office to extend the privilege to other Dominions. The inevitable multiplication of Dominion representatives in a single foreign capital was feared. The danger of this proliferation, concluded one official, was that the British Government 'might find themselves committed to the support of some policy which they did not approve.'²¹ In order to avoid this, J.A.C. Tilley, a Foreign Office official, was willing to concede a Canadian Ambassador representing the whole of the British Empire. He preferred, however, the appointment of a Canadian counsellor to be part of the British Embassy staff in Washington. And yet he was surprised that his favourite recommendation, of encouraging Canadians, and all Dominions, to protect their interests by joining the diplomatic service, had found so little favour.²² Curzon was more incisive in his summation. 'Of course', he minuted, 'the real point is that a state that needs an ambassador is actually independent and that one of the few necessary vestiges of imperial control will have disappeared.'²³ On this tenet, under the critical eye of Curzon, the Foreign Office prepared a memorandum

outlining the objections of the Foreign Office.

In this memorandum, the Foreign Office based its case on the problem of responsibility for Britain and the dangerous precedent this would set for the British Empire. Granting a Dominion its own representative would be detrimental to the British Government both in its internal and external relations. Externally, the Foreign Office feared the advantages foreign governments, particularly the United States, would enjoy. The Foreign Office feared that the United States would benefit from conducting direct negotiations with the representative of a Dominion without the knowledge of the British Government. This could lead to later problems. Internally, these arrangements might create difficulties between British and the Dominion Governments, if a Dominion, in its independent negotiations, produced a policy contrary to the one advanced by the British Government. Imperial diplomatic unity would clearly cease if two conflicting policies were stated. The Foreign Office memorandum therefore deprecated the Canadian proposal for a Canadian representative at Washington. Instead, it suggested that Canada be treated as a special case and granted its own counsellor at the Embassy in Washington. Then, the memorandum concluded, 'The aspirations of the Canadian Government might be satisfied by such an arrangement while the conduct of negotiations with the U.S. Government would remain centralized in His Majesty's Ambassador. On the other hand, the Ambassador would benefit by the advice of the Counsellor on the many Canadian questions which come up at Washington.'²⁴ Curzon circulated the memorandum to the Colonial Office and the Prime Minister, Lloyd George. Unfortunately, this

memorandum cannot now be located in the Colonial Office files and the Colonial Office's reaction to this provocative statement is lost. In October, 1919, the Foreign Office referenced this memorandum²⁵ in preparing a response to the Canadians.

In the autumn of 1919, Tilley drafted a Foreign Office counter-proposal differing significantly from that of Amery. His approach was cautious, unimaginative and, to a degree, coy. He proposed that Canadian representation at Washington be granted but only with restricted credentials. Concentrating on credentials, Tilley stressed the importance of not issuing separate ones, so that the Canadian representative could not carry out his instructions without the approval of the Ambassador. Moreover, if a disagreement between the Ambassador and the Canadian minister arose, then the matter should be referred to the Imperial and Canadian Governments. A representative working within these limitations could not, he believed, jeopardize diplomatic imperial unity. In his concluding remarks, Tilley frankly admitted that his scheme could only minimise the damage. Its implementation was entirely dependent upon Canada. 'If the Canadian Government will agree to these terms', wrote Tilley, 'I think that we shall come off well.'²⁶

Before the Foreign Office reached a firm decision on its counter-proposal, the opinion of Lord Reading, a former British Ambassador at Washington, was solicited. Reading concurred there should be one voice in Washington. He recommended, in order to obtain the Canadians' approval, that the British Government should exploit the Canadians' willingness to allow its representative to become an integral

part of the Embassy establishment.²⁷ He supported the proposal by Lord Hardinge, the Permanent-Under Secretary in the Foreign Office, that the Canadian Minister should rank next to the Ambassador, which meant that in the Ambassador's absence he would assume charge of the Embassy. Both suggestions were incorporated in the Foreign Office's proposed response and, in due course, in the reply sent to Canada. These proposals later became the source of many difficulties.

The issue of representation was brought to the British Cabinet by Milner on 16 October 1919. While members of the Cabinet favoured the principle of Canadian representation at Washington, they did not probe the constitutional implications. They chose to regard the proposal as a 'temporary and experimental arrangement pending the conference to be held in the not too distant future to discuss the readjustment of the constitutional relations of the component parts of the British Empire.'²⁸ The Cabinet then returned the issue to the Foreign and Colonial Offices to sort out the particulars.

The process began with the Colonial Office forwarding to the Foreign Office a draft reply to the Canadian Government. As recommended by Amery, in order to avoid 'an appearance of dualism', the Colonial Office suggested that two branches be established in the Embassy. The remainder of the draft described how the specifics would be dealt with under such an arrangement. The Colonial Office concluded with hope that the 'Ambassador himself should in future be selected by the Canadian and British Governments in consultation.'²⁹

In the Foreign Office, Curzon rejected the Colonial Office's proposal which he thought 'went unnecessarily

far...³⁰ In an attempt to compose a reply acceptable both to the Colonial and the Foreign Offices, Curzon held a meeting with Milner, Reading and Hardinge. The meeting produced a second draft counter-offer which supposedly reflected the consensus achieved in the meeting. Prepared by the Foreign Office, it was a draft which resembled the Foreign Office's, not the Colonial Office's, proposed reply.

This second draft differed from the original plan of the Colonial Office in several crucial ways. The Colonial Office proposed the establishment of two separate branches in the Embassy. The office did not recommend one way or the other as to whether the Canadian would take charge in the absence of the British Ambassador. The office also recommended that the Canadian representative have the title 'Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary'. The Foreign Office opposed two separate branches and the scheme was abandoned. Instead, emphasis was placed on the integration of the Canadian representative into the establishment of the Embassy. This scheme would 'preserve the closest connection between him and Ambassador, so that there may be a constant interchange of views on matters of common concern.' The Foreign Office, also, eliminated 'Envoy Extraordinary' from the Canadian's title. The title of the Canadian Minister would only be Minister Plenipotentiary. This reduction in title reflected the desire of the Foreign Office to restrict the credentials, since in its view a distinction existed between the title of Minister Plenipotentiary and Minister Plenipotentiary prefixed with Envoy Extraordinary, because the latter implied independent accreditation to a foreign government while the former did not. Finally, unlike the Colonial Office draft,

the joint reply made it clear that the Canadian Minister would assume charge of the Embassy in the absence of the Ambassador. The Foreign Office's desire to lock the Canadian minister into the establishment of the Embassy had prevailed, and at least for appearance's sake imperial unity in foreign policy was maintained. A final difference between the two drafts was the latter's omission of the provision for the Canadian Government to participate in the selection of the next British Ambassador at Washington.³¹ Eventually it was this draft which became the official response of the British Government. The views of the Foreign Office, for the most part, had overridden those of the Colonial Office. The concessions made to the Canadian Government were qualified. The 'imaginative plan' of the Colonial Office had been shelved.

The British Government sent its reply to the Canadian Government at the end of October and in mid-December received notification from Devonshire, the then Governor General, that his ministers found 'so far as practical result...' the British counter-proposal did 'not differ in substance from that put forward in my telegram of 3rd October.'³² There must have been relief in Whitehall. The acceptance of the counter-proposal meant that Canada's separatist move against a unified imperial foreign policy had been checked. The agreement of the Canadians to have their minister form part of the Embassy's establishment and be second-in-charge had ensured that the solidarity of the Empire would be maintained and emphasised. The Foreign Office regarded the agreement to exclude 'Envoy Extraordinary' from the minister's title as Canadian forfeiture of its minister's independence.³³

Subsequently, the Canadian concession to permit its

minister to become part of the establishment of the Embassy caused difficulties. Initially, however, the only objections that the Canadian Government voiced were those of the letter of credence and the matter of precedence. The Canadians requested that their government participate in the letter of credence to the United States, whereas Britain recommended that Curzon write the communication of credence. On the matter of precedence, the Canadian Government desired its minister to have the same precedence as the Ministers from other countries resident in the United States.³⁴

Problems over the letter of credence were quickly resolved by having the King sign the letter. Acting on a request from the Colonial Office, the Foreign Office composed the reply to the Canadians to explain this arrangement. The Colonial Office felt it necessary to stress 'that it should be worded as not to give the Canadian Government any ground for supposing that we are suggesting a letter of credence from the King merely because they have expressed the wish to participate in the issue of the accrediting letter.'³⁵ There is nothing to indicate that the Foreign Office shared this concern to avoid any Canadian misunderstanding of British action.

The issue of precedence was not resolved so readily and consumed four months of correspondence between Canada and Britain before it was settled. Evident in the correspondence was the Canadian Government's lack of appreciation of the distinctions that the British Government drew in its counter-proposal. Canadian ministers believed their desire to have their representative enjoy 'precedence on the same basis as the Ministers of other countries'³⁶ maintained the spirit of

the arrangement described in the British telegram. Some Colonial Office officials believed the Canadian Government was not honouring what had been agreed, or failed to understand the terms. One official believed that the Canadian interpretation of the agreement broke with 'the spirit of the conditions.'³⁷ Confusion between the two governments was compounded when Milner decided that his officials misunderstood the Canadian request. Clearly, as he perceived it, the Canadians sought only that their Minister should have precedence over 'our Chargé d'Affaires or first Secretary and ensure his [Canadian's minister] acting in the absence of the Ambassador.'³⁸ The months which followed proved, however, that it was Milner, not his official, who misunderstood the Canadian interpretation of the arrangements.

Whitehall did not confront the question of precedence again until prompted to by a telegram from Devonshire. In a telegram dated the 1 April 1920, Devonshire stated his government's interpretation of the agreement that the Canadian Minister, as Minister Plenipotentiary, would have precedence in the diplomatic corps. The Canadian Government cited the cases of Saxony and Bavaria before the War, who maintained Ministers at European Courts concurrently with Ambassadors of the German Empire, to justify their Minister's rank.³⁹

The Canadian assumption, that its Minister would have precedence in the diplomatic corps, stimulated a flurry of minutes among British officials. The Colonial Office, while attempting to gauge the reaction of the Foreign Office to Devonshire's most recent telegram, received from them the copy of a telegram sent by Ronald Lindsay, Chargé d'Affaires in Washington. The telegram told of a meeting between N.W.

Rowell, representative of the Canadian Government and F.L. Polk, representing the American Secretary of State. Lindsay observed of the meeting:

Only point upon which there appears to be real difficulty is that of precedence. Canadian Government very strongly of view that Canadian representative should have such rank as would entitle him to precedence according to date of appointment with ministers of other countries. Mr. Polk's view is that Canadian representative...would be entitled to precedence only after ministers of other countries as these ministers are Envoys Extraordinary as well as Ministers Plenipotentiary. ...⁴⁰

C.T. Davis, in the Colonial Office found that the Canadians were changing their interpretation of precedence from that originally stated in their suggested press announcement. Davis found he could not support the examples of Bavaria and Saxony as justification for ranking the Canadian minister; they seemed irrelevant to the Canadian case. He did not propose a response, but chose instead to pass the issue along to the Foreign Office.

The Foreign Office's draft response was decisive in its rejection of the Canadian claim to precedence with those of other countries. Curzon could not locate any precedent to support the Canadian's belief that its Minister should rank with the representatives from other countries. The German analogies were disregarded because the German states in question, unlike Canada, had once been independent and it was this prior independence which justified their having independent envoys. Rowell, anticipating that appropriate precedents might not exist to support Canada's request, had recommended that the Council for the League of Nations be persuaded to revise the diplomatic precedents adopted in the

act of Congress at Vienna. This suggestion the Foreign Office draft firmly rejected in a tone which was condescending and mocking. 'This suggestion', noted the Foreign Office draft, 'amounts in fact to a proposal that an endeavour should be made to secure revision of the whole existing diplomatic practice of the world in order to meet the exceptional case of the Canadian representative at Washington, and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs cannot feel that such a course is practical...'⁴¹

Amery, seeking a solution to the rank of the Canadian Minister, sought to appease the Dominion. He recommended that Envoy Extraordinary be affixed to the title of the Canadian minister and left as an option for the United States to honour as they saw fit. His suggestion never left the Colonial Office as Amery's offer to explore the proposal in a draft letter to Ottawa was vetoed by Milner. Milner's refusal was in keeping with his general philosophy concerning the evolving relationship between Great Britain and her Dominions. He believed that evolution could neither be halted nor should it be. He did, however, think that the initiative resided with the Dominions, not with Great Britain. Using one of his preferred phrases, Milner denied Amery the right to pursue his scheme as 'it would be wiser to wait until we hear further from Ottawa.'⁴²

Milner's rejection of Amery's initiative meant the Colonial Office had no alternative response to the Foreign Office's proposal. Accordingly, in early May, the Colonial Office sent a telegram to the Canadian Government rejecting Canada's use of the analogies of Bavaria and Saxony. The Canadian representative would rank, the telegram explained,

above Chargés d'Affaires but after Envoys Extraordinary and Ministers Plenipotentiary who are heads of missions of other countries.⁴³ The views of the Foreign Office again prevailed. The Canadian Government, for its part, did not pursue the matter. Thus, on 10 May 1920, timed so to be announced simultaneously in the Canadian and British Houses of Commons, the appointment of a Canadian representative at Washington was made public. A. Bonar Law, Government Leader in the House, made the announcement in the British House of Commons:

As a result of recent discussions, an arrangement has been concluded between the British and Canadian Governments to provide more complete representation at Washington of Canadian interests than has hitherto existed. Accordingly it has been agreed that His Majesty, on the advice of his Canadian Ministers, shall appoint a Minister Plenipotentiary, who will have charge of Canadian affairs, and will at all times be the ordinary channel of communication with the United States Government in matters of purely Canadian concern, acting upon instruction from, and reporting direct to, the Canadian Government. In the absence of the Ambassador, the Canadian Minister will take charge of the whole Embassy and of representation of Imperial, as well as Canadian, interests. He will be accredited by His Majesty to the President with necessary powers for the purpose.

This new arrangement will not denote any departure, either on the part of the British Government or of the Canadian Government, from the principle of diplomatic unity of the British Empire.

Need for this important step has been fully realised by both Governments for some time. For a good many years there has been direct communication between Washington and Ottawa, but the constantly increasing importance of Canadian interests in the United States had made it apparent that Canada should be represented there in some distinctive manner, for this would doubtless tend to expedite negotiations, and naturally first-hand acquaintance with Canadian conditions would promote good understanding. In view of the peculiarly close relations that have existed between the people of Canada and those of the United States, it is

confidently expected as well that this new step will have the very desirable result of maintaining and strengthening friendly relations and co-operation between the British Empire and the United States.⁴⁴

Discussions of the appointment and its implications and ramifications failed to command great interest either in the British Cabinet or in the British Parliament. Apart from the Cabinet's consideration of the original request, the minutes show that it was not raised again. Having referred the matter to the Colonial and Foreign Offices, the Cabinet, in the ensuing eight months, limited its participation to reports of progress in the form of relevant memoranda and telegrams. The British Parliament displayed little more interest than the Cabinet, even though a few members raised questions occasionally. One member interested in the issue was Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Murray, former Parliamentary Private Secretary to then Foreign Secretary Sir E. Grey, 1910-1914 and a former Assistant Military Attaché at Washington, 1917. It was Murray's question on 7 April 1919 which alerted the House of Commons to a potential Canadian request for representation at Washington. At regular intervals from April until June 1919, Murray and Grattan Doyle, a Conservative member, sought information from the government. Doyle attempted to determine whether the British Government acknowledged that 'the time is now opportune for the Dominion to have a special representative at Washington, with a status and prestige commensurate with the new Canada which has developed during the years of the War?'⁴⁵ The British Government offered only evasive replies.

The issue of Canadian representation came up in February, March and April, and on each occasion the government refused

comment as negotiations were pending. It was only in May that the questions from MPs sought more than information and queried the implications of the appointment. Murray asked of the government: 'Would it not be better to leave it to be settled by the Imperial Conference, to be summoned as soon as possible to deal with the constitutional readjustment of various portions of the Empire?'⁴⁶ Again the government avoided a precise comment. Even after the announcement of the appointment, the government avoided any discussion. Bonar Law's observation that, 'Every new development affects the constitution,'⁴⁷ was to be the only statement of the government upon the constitutional implications of the agreement. Requests for the tabling of relevant correspondence, further debates and a White Paper on the appointment were all refused by the government.

The Members of Parliament who spoke out on the Canadian appointment were few in number.⁴⁸ Of these it was Murray who accented the constitutional development of the appointment. In a long address to the House on 20 April 1920, Murray traced the appointment back to Resolution IX of the Imperial Conference of 1917 which, he argued, reflected the importance of foreign policy to the Dominions. The Dominions had in 1917 stressed 'that foreign policy and foreign relations ... must certainly in future be made compatible with the aspirations of the people of the Dominions.' Murray questioned the wisdom of the government in permitting Canada separate representation. The reservations he expressed publicly were commonly held in private amongst officials. He believed that separate Canadian representation in Washington marked 'the beginning of a great constitutional change' within the Empire.⁴⁹

Devonshire, the Canadian Governor General, and Sir George Perley, the Canadian High Commissioner in London, played a secondary role in negotiations over the appointment. Devonshire appears in the Colonial Office correspondence only as the messenger. Perley, too played a minor part. There exists only scant correspondence from him to the Colonial Office. Indeed, it fell to the Colonial Office to keep Perley informed about the progress of events.

Both the Foreign and Colonial Offices watched with interest the heated debate which followed the 1920 announcement in the Canadian House of Commons. The Liberals, who were the official opposition party, supported the appointment of a Canadian Minister at Washington. They took exception, however, to having the Canadian representative take charge of the British Embassy in the absence of the Ambassador. Mackenzie King, leader of the Liberal Party, described the decision as one that would 'create unnecessary friction between the governments.' R.M. Dawson, a biographer of King, regards the views expressed by King in this debate as the first clear insight into the stance that he would adopt on constitutional development. Certainly the conclusion that King reached in the debates was indicative also of his future positions on foreign policy. Mackenzie King, upon reflection, presented his interpretation of what the Canadian public desired.⁵⁰

...What seems to be the more rational course is the middle one, that in matters between Canada and other countries Canada should manage her own affairs, and that in matters between Great Britain and other countries, Great Britain should manage her own affairs, always when necessary with co-operation and conference between the two...

I do not believe the Canadian people

wish to launch too deep into experiments in foreign policy at the present time. All matters of government, and particularly matters affecting diplomatic relations, are matters of constitutional evolution. If we are going to advance, by all means let us proceed along the line of evolution; but let us take one step at a time.⁵¹

The Colonial Office did not attach value to King's remarks. One official summed up the debate as 'very interesting'.⁵² In fact, the only passage highlighted in the Colonial Office copy of the Canadian debate was that concerning remarks by W.S. Fielding, the former finance minister in the Laurier Government. Enunciating his opposition to Canadian representation at Washington, Fielding claimed 'that if the seasoned officers of the Colonial Office and of the Foreign Office could give their private thought they would tell us they find in this arrangement a very dangerous experiment indeed.' The only observation made on Mackenzie King's views was to declare Fielding's 'attack far more effective than Mr. King's criticism'.⁵³

The matter had ended, or so the British officials believed. But the failure of the Canadian Government to appoint a representative meant that the issue was only dormant. It did not become topical again until the Irish Free State sought its own representation at Washington in 1924.

In the interlude of 1920 to 1924, interest in Canada and the Colonial Office waned. The records of the Colonial Office's correspondence with Canada, in these years, show that neither side gave Canadian representation in Washington much attention. It is against this lull in interest that the sustained concern of the Foreign Office in the matter is remarkable. From 1920 to 1924, the Foreign Office kept up to

date its information on the issue of Canadian representation at Washington. The Foreign Office's records, moreover, show not only that it continued to monitor the potential appointment, but also lengthy internal memoranda reveal the self-examination that the Foreign Office conducted in view of the constitutional changes occurring in Canada. The Foreign Office wanted to be prepared when Canada approached them again. The lack of Colonial Office documentation in the interim years of 1920-24 marks the return to a passive role reacting only when pressured.

The Interim Years: 1920-24

In his annual report of 1921, Sir A. C. Geddes, the British Ambassador to Washington since March 1920, observed there had been no further correspondence with the Canadian Government during the year on the subject of Canadian representation at Washington. His report did highlight a debate during 1921 in the Canadian House of Commons on the subject. Observing that no partisan lines had been adopted, he wrote that the House rejected the proposal that the Canadian Representative should assume command of the Embassy in the absence of the Ambassador. In the debate, the Prime Minister, Arthur Meighen, who had succeeded Borden as Conservative leader and Prime Minister in July 1920, declared that 'in point of sentiment' he was with those who opposed the idea, although he admitted that from a practical standpoint, 'from the angle of need,' the step was desirable. He evaded giving any definite answer as to when the post would be filled.⁵⁴

Meighen never appointed a Canadian Minister to

Washington. He repeatedly defended his inaction by explaining he was unable to find a suitable candidate. One wonders whether Meighen's inability to locate someone suitable was in part because he did not try very hard. He never shared Borden's enthusiasm for the post and was content to place the appointment low in his priorities. Meighen's general disinterest was initially shared by his successor and political foe, Mackenzie King. King, having led the Liberal Party to victory in the general election of 1921, proved as reluctant as Meighen in making an actual appointment. Admittedly, King and the Liberals disliked the terms agreed with Britain, that the Canadian Minister would be second in command, but the new Prime Minister did not push for any change in the agreement. Instead, he chose to let the matter drift for most of his first year in office. Ironically, King did not bother to pursue the matter of the appointment with the British Government and it was only after being questioned by Geddes in the summer of 1922 that his views on the matter were revealed. In the first week of November, Geddes wrote to the Foreign Office and discussed the renewed interest in Canada for an appointment to Washington and explained how he had tackled the matter with King that previous summer. Prior to King's visit to Washington in July 1922, Geddes wrote that he had heard public opinion in Canada favoured a 'diplomatic representative at Washington who shall be entirely independent of Embassy not... a special member, who would take charge in the absence of the ambassador.' An independent representative, Geddes believed, was also favoured by the Canadian Prime Minister and Cabinet. Moreover, he felt the Canadians believed they were 'moving in a direction wholly

agreeable' to the British Government. This supposed belief troubled Geddes, who was convinced that the Canadians misunderstood the attitude of the British Government. The question of misunderstanding on the part of the Canadians was one of the points he raised with King when they met in Washington⁵⁵ in July 1922. Geddes secured a promise from King that the Canadian Government would not act on the appointment without informing him and allowing further discussion. Geddes was pleased with this understanding and with his apparent success with King on a personal level. Writing of his relations with King Geddes concluded, 'Relations between Mackenzie King and myself are most cordial.' He was convinced that King did not want to appoint a diplomatic representative at all but rather 'a High Commissioner under some other title such as Canadian Government representative at Washington.'⁵⁶

The telegram from Geddes evoked a flourish of minutes in the Foreign Office. The first conclusion was that the matter should be postponed until considered by an Imperial Conference because full diplomatic representation of Canada at Washington 'really means independence of Canada.'⁵⁷ The telegram provided Curzon with the opportunity to voice his opposition to the original agreement of 1920. In a letter to the Colonial Office, he lashed out against the agreement calling it 'an unfortunate one in many respects...' His condemnation signified a reversal in policy, as it had been the Foreign Office which had urged the incorporation of the Canadian Minister into the establishment of the Embassy. Curzon's distancing himself from the original agreement indicates a growing belief in the Foreign Office that care had to be taken to prevent Britain from being committed to policies negotiated

between a Dominion and a foreign country. The Foreign Secretary was disturbed that the Canadians thought the arrangement from 1920 permitted the appointment of an independent representative. In Curzon's interpretation of the agreement, there was nothing to imply that it established 'a totally independent Canadian diplomatic representative at Washington.' He was, however, willing to accept a solution which 'Mackenzie King is reported to prefer', the appointment of a Canadian High Commissioner to Washington. Finally, the Foreign Secretary requested that the matter either be discussed among the Colonial Secretary, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Office, or alternatively, that it be brought to Cabinet in order to draft a response to the Canadians.⁵⁸ The records give no indication that either course was pursued.

Geddes kept the issue alive in the Foreign Office with his second telegram, sent one week after the first, which offered a brief history of the issue and concluded with a review of the current position. In late October, a 'vague rumour' reached Geddes that the Canadian Cabinet favoured appointing a Canadian diplomatic representative at Washington, 'who should be wholly independent of the British Embassy and who in no circumstances whatever would take charge of British Imperial interests.'⁵⁹ On the basis of this rumour, Geddes decided to pay a courtesy visit to the Governor General of Canada and attempt to determine the views of the Canadian Government. At his request, Lord Byng, who had succeeded Devonshire as Governor General in 1921, arranged meetings between the Canadian Prime Minister, his ministers and Geddes. The meetings confirmed the rumours Geddes had heard. 'Mr. McKenzie King [sic]⁶⁰', wrote Geddes, 'told me again with

great frankness that a majority of his Cabinet was wholly in favour of appointing a Canadian Minister, not an Ambassador, who would be entirely responsible to the Canadian Government for the handling of all Canadian questions, and that the Canadian representative's office should be distinct from the British Embassy.' Geddes was disturbed by Mackenzie King's understanding, and that of his Cabinet, 'that this plan was agreeable to His Majesty's British Government.'⁶¹

Geddes attempted to inform the Canadian Prime Minister that such a plan was flawed. He argued that if it was adopted, then Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India and the Irish Free State would soon claim the same privilege and imperial diplomatic unity would be compromised. He tried to convince King that multiple representatives would mean the end of imperial diplomatic unity. He found, however, that King did not appreciate 'that this multiplication of representatives would cause much difficulty.' Geddes then realized that he and King held two different conceptions of the Canadian representative's function. He decided that the Prime Minister 'was not thinking really of diplomatic relations at all, but having in Washington headquarters for Canadians travelling on business or pleasure; that his main idea of the work of Canadian representative was to deal with commercial and financial matters in the interest of Canadian trade.'⁶²

Concluding on a condescending note, Geddes wrote of his difficulties making Mackenzie King fully aware of the limitation of his representative, a factor which Mackenzie King apparently had not previously considered. 'In the course of our long conversations', Geddes wrote,

I had laid some stress on the fact that a diplomatic representative accredited to the President of the United States was strictly limited in his official approaches to the United States Government to conducting business with the President or the Secretary of State or the latter's official representative for the time being. This, I think, impressed Mr. McKenzie King [sic] as most important. Obviously this necessary limitation, which was not present to his mind, would largely prevent the Canadian representative from performing those duties which the Canadian Government anticipates that he will perform.⁶³

This broader explanation, which the second telegram gave, of the wishes of the Canadian Government, as Geddes understood them, pleased officials in the Foreign Office. They were relieved that the 1920 arrangement had been abandoned by the Canadians who did 'not want their man to take charge in the Ambassador's absence.'⁶⁴ One official ventured the hope that the Canadians would abandon the 'high sounding title' of 'Canadian Government Representative' in favour of 'Trade Agent' or 'Agent General'.⁶⁵ These fond hopes were dashed by Curzon's terse comment, 'I doubt it.'⁶⁶

The next move came from the Colonial Office which organised a meeting between Devonshire, now back in England, with the Canadian Ministers, W.S. Fielding and Ernest Lapointe, now in London. The Colonial Office offended the Foreign Office by requesting that they draft a memorandum examining the issue. The Foreign Office refused when it learned that the Canadian Government would be shown the document. A curt minute affirmed that 'departmentally' the responsibility was not the Foreign Office's. Again the Foreign Office expressed its desire that the matter be addressed by the Cabinet owing to its seriousness. The problem was 'one concerning the constitution of the Empire.

Separate diplomatic representation unequivocally means one thing: separation of Canada from the Empire.⁶⁷ The Colonial Office again approached the Foreign Office to draft a memorandum outlining the difficulties involved in setting up a separate Canadian Embassy or Legation.⁶⁸ Being assured that only Devonshire would see the document, the Foreign Office gave way and duly forwarded to the Colonial Office a summation of the matter from its point of view.⁶⁹

In this memorandum, the Foreign Office, not surprisingly, opposed the granting of separate representation to Canada as it would weaken 'imperial foreign policy, both in fact and in appearance'. First, the appointment of the Canadian representative would mean multiple representatives in Washington as Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and the Irish Free State would move quickly to claim their right to representation. Second, it would encourage stronger Canadian-American relations. There was a tone of apprehension as the Foreign Office reflected upon the close proximity of Washington and Ottawa. This, the department predicted, would present an 'opportunity to those elements in the United States (which at the present time include highly-placed and influential personalities) which aim at driving a wedge between Great Britain and the Dominions.' The Foreign Office was convinced the new arrangement would result in the Dominion's drift away from the Empire and towards the United States, since there was now nothing to check the growth of a closer association between Canada and the United States. 'It would also make it increasingly difficult for Canada to remain outside the various existing or projected Pan-American Leagues and Unions (should it be her wish to do so)', the Foreign

Office decided. The department was particularly troubled that all appearances of imperial diplomatic unity would be lost, and it predicted that the next step, which could not be refused, if independent Canadian representation were granted, would be the United States' appointment of a diplomatic representative to Ottawa. This 'double appointment would infallibly be understood by other Powers as equivalent to a virtual declaration of Canadian independence.'

The Foreign Office therefore resorted to the suggestion that the Canadians be dissuaded from seeking full independent representation in favour of having trade representatives, since trade would constitute the majority of the business. If the Canadian Government accepted this, the Canadian minister would rank with his counterparts in London and Paris, and imperial unity would be maintained. This course would prevent Britain from being held responsible for agreements negotiated between a Dominion and a foreign country and would revive the suggestion of Canadians participating in the British diplomatic service.⁷⁰

No firm conclusions were reached at the meeting between Devonshire, Fielding and Lapointe. The representative of the Foreign Office in attendance recorded that the only point agreed was that the Canadians would inform the British Government before taking any action. Although the meeting resulted in nothing new, the draft which the Foreign Office prepared for the meeting is of interest. It reflects the thought which officials at the Foreign Office gave the matter. The serious implications of the step were not lost to them, though their attempts to check Canadian desires were unrealistic. They were at best prolonging Canada's relentless

march towards complete control of all its affairs.

Press clippings on the issue of Canadian representation in Washington accumulated in the Foreign Office files throughout the summer of 1923. Rumours reached the department that the matter would be raised at the Imperial Conference that year and with it the question of the Canadian representation taking charge in the absence of the Ambassador. Curzon was unconcerned with these reports as he knew King had repudiated the idea of the Canadian Minister being second in command only a few days earlier.⁷¹ The issue again was tabled unresolved and was not revived until the request from the Irish Free State for representation at Washington.

Hindsight now shows that Geddes and the Foreign Office need not have worried about King and his Cabinet taking drastic action. In the four years which elapsed between King's assumption of power and the appointment of a Canadian Minister to Washington the Prime Minister showed only intermittent interest in the matter, a lethargy out of step with his image as a strident Canadian nationalist. Apart from occasional statements, King was not as interested with the issue as much as Borden had been. In the first two years in office, King needed to be prodded by the British Government to give an indication of his views on the question. Geddes' visit to Ottawa in the autumn of 1922 is one example when Britain pressured King to give his views. British persistence continued until the Irish Free State appointed the first Dominion minister to Washington. The Irish Free State used the foundation established by Canada to make the appointment. Whitehall predicted the appointment would prompt Canada into action, but British officials and politicians were wrong.

Once again, Britain induced King to state his policy in light of these developments, and not vice versa.

Appointing an Irish Free State representative at Washington

In 1924 the Irish Free State was granted its own representation at Washington. The process of appointing an Irish Free State representative took only months from the initial request. At first, Whitehall believed that Canada would now appoint its representative to Washington, if only to avoid being upstaged by the Irish Free State. When the Dominions were informed of the Irish Free State's request, officials regarded Sir Arthur Currie, the Canadian general who commanded the Canadian Corps in Flanders 1917-19, as the most probable appointment by Canada.⁷² The Canadian Government, however, remained inactive and soon the Foreign Office doubted whether an appointment was imminent. The Foreign Office was surprised and dismayed by this silence. The failure of the Canadians to appoint their minister before the Irish Free State's minister created problems of precedence. The Foreign Office decided Canada's seniority had to be upheld. It therefore established precedence for the Irish Free State representative, not by the date of appointment, but by 'the historic priority of the Dominions.'⁷³ Canada's premier position had been protected, but only at the initiative of the Foreign Office without instructions from the Canadian Government.

Although King and his government were not motivated to appoint a representative or even to defend the seniority of the Canada, the Irish request was important to Canada, as the Irish based their claim on enjoying the same status as Canada.

This meant that Whitehall was forced to establish what the final agreement had been with Canada on the matter. At no time did the question arise of the Irish Free State representative's taking charge of the Embassy. A minute by William Tyrrell, an Assistant Secretary in the Foreign Office, reflected the new direction of the department's thinking concerning representation of the Dominions in foreign countries. Whereas previously the preference had been to avoid independent Dominion representatives, Tyrrell now advocated such representatives and that Irish, as well as Canadian, representation should be 'entirely separate from, and independent of, the British Embassy at Washington.' The conclusion was reached on the ground of responsibility. Tyrrell believed this was the only solution if confusion and friction were to be avoided: the British Government must not 'divorce power from responsibility.'⁷⁴

Sir Eyre A. Crowe, the Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, agreed with Tyrrell as he lashed out at the agreement of 1920. 'The compromise agreement which was originally proposed to Canada was a thoroughly bad one, and it is lucky that Canada since found it to be quite impracticable.' He, too, favoured the representatives being independent from the British Embassy, so that the Ambassador would not be held responsible for the actions of the Dominions.⁷⁵ Ramsay MacDonald, Foreign Secretary from January to November 1924, agreed with his officials. In more general terms he described the new course upon which Britain was embarking with her Dominions. 'We are entering in this and in other respects a dangerous and difficult path as regards the Dominions and their powers.' He feared the potential for

establishing 'a terrible inheritance of misunderstanding and friction.' MacDonald also was concerned that the Foreign Office 'should at once try to make the dangers of that position plain to the Colonial Office.'⁷⁶ The Foreign Office complained to the Colonial Office that it was impossible to define Irish Free State representation on basis of Canadian status. It admitted that it was unable to define Canada's status as the rejected proposal of 1920 left the matter unresolved.⁷⁷

Despite complaints from the Foreign Office that the Colonial Office was 'going too fast',⁷⁸ the Irish Free State appointed a representative in June 1924. In his letter of introduction to the United States, the representative was commissioned to handle 'matters at Washington exclusively relating to the Irish Free State' and was duly accorded the title 'Minister Plenipotentiary'. He was not to assume charge of the Embassy in the absence of the Ambassador. The letter also stressed that in 'matters which are of Imperial concern or which affect other Dominions in the Commonwealth in common with the Irish Free State will continue to be handled as heretofore by this Embassy.' Specifically, the arrangements did not 'denote any departure from the principle of the diplomatic unity of the Empire.' This assertion was contradicted by the ensuing statement which stressed that the Irish Free State had control over all its external affairs. 'In matters falling within his sphere the Irish Free State Minister would not be subject to the control of His Majesty's Ambassador nor would His Majesty's Ambassador be responsible for the Irish Minister's actions.'⁷⁹

The distancing of the British Ambassador from the Irish

Free State representative was the work of the Foreign Office. As soon as the Foreign Office realised that the Irish Free State representative was independent, it demanded the British Government be relieved of any responsibility for his actions. 'As we told the Colonial Office on April 14th, it is clearly impossible for His Majesty's Government to accept responsibility for action over which they would in fact have no control.'⁸⁰ Successful though the Foreign Office was in separating its Ambassador from the Irish Free State Representative, it did not concede much hope for the success of the arrangements. The 'experiment' was described as 'foredoomed to failure.' The Foreign Office reasoned that 'The United States government will turn to the central authority of the Empire in every case in which they think that the Irish Free State Government is unable or unwilling to satisfy their requests.'⁸¹

The process leading to the appointment of the Irish Free State representative formed an important element in the evolution in status of a Canadian representative in Washington. The Foreign Office's concession that the Irish Free State's representative be independent was a critical development. It was largely due to Canada that the Foreign Office allowed the Irish Free State and Canada and other Dominions to have independent representatives. Although the Irish Free State had the first representative from amongst the Dominions, it based its claim on Canada's status and it was this example that governed the Foreign Office's response. Canada was very much in the forefront of the British officials' minds as they negotiated and worked out the particulars of the Irish Free State representation.

The matter is resolved: 1925-26

Internal minutes in the Foreign Office and its correspondence with the Colonial Office throughout 1925-26 show that it anticipated the Canadian Government's request for a representative at any time. While his officials were anxious to start drafting the terms which would govern the agreement, Sir Austen Chamberlain, MacDonald's successor as Foreign Secretary, curtailed Foreign Office officials' efforts. In a strongly worded minute, he declared the debate closed until the Canadian Government made a formal approach. 'Any proposals on this subject should come from the Canadian Government. It is not for His Majesty's Government to take the initiative.'⁸² Another two years were to elapse after the appointment of the Irish Free State representative before the Canadian Government officially requested the appointment of its own representative in Washington. Using the Irish letter of accreditation in 1924, which took its origin from the announcement made in 1920, the only significant change concerned the expansion of the Canadian minister's title to include 'Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary'. While his officials in the Foreign Office vehemently opposed the granting of 'Envoy Extraordinary', Chamberlain felt that it was a small concession for the maintenance of goodwill.⁸³

The issue of Canadian representation at Washington possessed little interest for the British Cabinet. Apart from occasional briefings, the Cabinet was content to leave the shaping of policy to the Foreign and Colonial Offices. The British Parliament was also unconcerned. Thus, the departments were left to devise a policy and reach an agreement with the Canadian Government. The struggle which

persisted through the years from 1919 to 1926 provides an insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office in the imperial setting.

Throughout the twenties, as the issue of Canadian representation was dealt with and resolved, the approach of these two departments sharply contrasted. The Colonial Office was passive, reacting only when confronted with formal requests from the Canadian Government. The Foreign Office, however, was more aggressive in anticipating the Canadians' next move. Driven by the desire to anticipate the Canadians, the Foreign Office constantly sought and scrutinized any new information. This aggressive approach, bolstered by its senior status in the cabinet, resulted in the dominance of Foreign Office opinion in policy formation.

The view of Whitehall towards Canadian representation at Washington passed through several stages. In the early twenties, the emphasis was placed on dissuading Canada from having an independent representative. This is reflected in the British counter-proposal of 1920 which had the Canadian minister incorporated into the establishment at the British Embassy. By 1924, the focus shifted away from integration to separation. Whitehall became concerned to protect itself from responsibility for any agreements negotiated independently by a dominion with a foreign government. Whitehall's concessions to the Irish Free State, regarding an independent minister, appeared to mark British acceptance that unified imperial foreign policy was over. Britain's private prediction that the Irish Free State experiment would fail showed the lingering hope that imperial foreign policy might hold together. As will be seen in the subsequent chapters, the

British hope of continued imperial diplomatic unity continued for another two years. In 1926, when Canada finally appointed a minister to Washington, Chamberlain's willingness to expand the minister's title to include 'Envoy Extraordinary' signified complete acceptance that imperial diplomatic unity ceased to exist.

1. Although the issue of separate Canadian representation at Washington was crucial to both Canada and Britain, so far historians have examined the history of the question only from the Canadian standpoint. One highly regarded study on the subject has been written by Robert Bothwell. While his article yields an excellent portrayal of events leading up to the initial agreement of 1920 for Canadian representation at Washington, the perspective remains essentially Canadian. Robert Bothwell, 'Canadian Representation at Washington', Canadian Historical Review, vol. LIII, June, 1972.

2. Bothwell, p. 127, taken from Canada House of Commons Debates, 15 December 1909.

3. Ibid. p. 129. Laurier had not always been content with relations between Canada and the United States. A survey of Canadian-American relations during Laurier's term as Prime Minister can be found in C.P. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 1, Toronto, 1977, ch. 4.

From 1896 to 1909, Canadian-American relations varied from times of animosity to times of amicability. Relations between the two countries were particularly strained during the Alaskan boundary dispute. The manner and terms of settlement angered Laurier towards the United States and Britain. The supposedly impartial panel whose job it was to oversee a settlement was dominated by representation of American interests. The British Government did nothing to assist Canada's cause and ultimately, Laurier was forced to accept the Alaskan treaty. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 1, pp. 85-99.

4. Bothwell, p. 129.

5. It was a matter that festered for years with him; see Canada House of Commons Debates, 17 May 1920.

6. Bothwell, p.126, taken from James Bryce, 'Thoughts on Imperial Problems,' in Canadian Club of Ottawa, Addresses and Speeches 1912-1913, Ottawa, 1913, pp. 183-184.

7. R.C. Brown, Robert Laird Borden, vol.II, Toronto, 1980, p. 173.

8. As C.P. Stacey observes in his Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 1, the Canadian official request, to the British Government, borrowed some of phraseology from

Resolution IX of 1917. Phrases such as arrangements for 'continuous consultation in all important matters of common concern' and 'such necessary concerted action, founded on consultation' are direct quotes from the resolution. See C.P. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 1, pp. 314-315.

9. PRO, CO 42/1012/57047, Devonshire to Milner, 3 October 1919.

10. PRO, CO 42/1012/57047, minute by G.V. Fiddes, 6 October 1919.

11. PRO, CO 42/1012/57047, minute by H. Lambert, 6 October 1919.

12. While Robert Bothwell credits Milner for conceiving this 'imaginative' plan, the Colonial papers do not readily suggest that Milner was indeed the author. The first written suggestion of this scheme, in the Colonial Office papers, came from the pen of Amery. Of Amery's minute which suggested the scheme Milner wrote, 'I agree generally with Colonel Amery's minute.' Milner did recommend to Cabinet that the minute should form the basis of a counter-proposal to the Canadians. PRO, CO 42/1012/57047, minute by Milner, 9 October 1919.

13. PRO, CO 42/1012/57047, minute by Amery, 7 October 1919.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. United Kingdom, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Fifth Series, vol. 114, col. 1712, question by Lieut-Col Arthur Murray, and col. 2190, question by P.A. Hurd.

17. PRO, FO 371/4249, A81810/3896/45, minute by R.S. Sperling, 30 April 1919.

18. PRO, FO 371/4249, A93898/89736/45, Milner to Devonshire, 23 May 1919.

19. PRO, FO 371/4249, A81810/3896/45, R.S. Sperling, Foreign Office to H.N. Taft, Colonial Office, 10 June 1919.

20. PRO, FO 371/4249, A81810/3896/45, minute by 'A.C.', 4 June 1919.

21. PRO, FO 371/4249, A93898/89736/45, minute by R.S. Sperling, 26 June 1919.

22. Ibid., minute by J.A.C. Tilley, 30 June 1919.

23. Ibid., minute by Curzon, 6 July 1919.

24. Ibid., memorandum, 8 August 1919.

25. PRO, FO 371/4249, A93898/89736/45, memorandum, 8 August 1919.

26. PRO, FO 371/4252, A90/90/45, minute by J.A.C. Tilley, 8 October 1919.

27. Ibid., minute by Marquess of Reading, 12 October 1919.

28. PRO, CAB 23/12/631(3).

29. PRO, CO 42/1012/57047, the draft is undated but was submitted for consideration to the Foreign Office by 16 October 1919.

30. PRO, FO 371/4252, A90/90/45, minute by Curzon, 16 October 1919.

31. PRO, CO 42/1012/57047, draft response by Foreign Office based upon meeting between Curzon, Milner, Reading and Hardinge, October 1919.

32. Document on Canadian External Relations: 1919-1925, vol. 3, Ottawa, 1970, (hereafter DCER, 3), document 10, Devonshire to Milner, 20 December 1919.

33. PRO, CO 42/1012/57047, draft prepared by Foreign Office based upon meeting between Curzon, Milner, Reading and Hardinge October 1919.

34. PRO, CO 42/1012/57047, Devonshire to Milner, 19 October 1919.

35. PRO, FO 371/4252, A887/90/45, C.T. Davis, Colonial Office to J.A.C. Tilley, Foreign Office, 1 January 1920.

36. PRO, 42/1012/72624, Devonshire to Milner, 19 December 1920.

37. PRO, CO 42/1012/72624, minute by H. Lambert, 20 December 1919.

38. PRO, CO 42/1012/72624, minute by Milner, 23 December 1919.

39. PRO, CO 42/1018/17228, Devonshire to Milner, 1 April 1920.

40. PRO, FO 371/4566, A1285/333/45, R. Lindsay to Foreign Office, 2 April 1920.

41. Ibid., Foreign Office draft reply to Canadian telegram of 1 April 1920.

42. PRO, CO 42/1018/17228, minute by Milner, 14 April 1920.

43. PRO, CO 42/1018/17228, Milner to Acting Governor General of Canada, 4 May 1920.

44. United Kingdom, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons Debates, Fifth Series, vol. 129, cols. 205-206, 10 May 1920.

45. Ibid., vol. 116, col. 1672, June 1919.

46. Ibid., vol. 129, col. 1695, 3 May 1920.

47. Ibid., vol. 129, col. 1778, 1 June 1920.

48. In the British House of Commons debates for the period April 1919 to July 1920, only seven members posed questions. The bulk of the question were from Lieut-Col. Arthur Murray and Mr. Hurd.

49. United Kingdom, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Fifth Series, vol. 128, cols. 995-998, 26 April 1920.

50. R.M. Dawson, William Lyon Mackenzie King, vol. 1, London, 1958, pp. 334-335.

51. Dawson, pp.334-335, taken from Canada House of Commons Debates, 30 June 1920, p. 4543.

52. PRO, CO 42/1020/36890, minute by Colonial Office official, 26 July 1920.

53. PRO, CO 42/1020/36890, minute by H. Lambert, 27 July 1920.

54. PRO, FO 371/7310, A3344/3344/45, annual report of 1921 from the British Embassy in the United States of America.

55. PRO, FO 371/7313, A6722/4517/45, A.C. Geddes to Foreign Office, 3 November 1922.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid., minute by E.A. Crowe, 6 November 1922.

58. Ibid., R.S. Sperling, Foreign Office to Under Secretary for the Colonies, 10 November 1922.

59. PRO, FO 371/7313, A6855/4517/45, A.C. Geddes to Curzon, 13 November 1922.

60. Ibid., A.C. Geddes to Curzon, 13 November 1922. Throughout the memorandum, Mackenzie King's name is spelt incorrectly as 'Mr. McKenzie King'.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid., minute by H.J. Seymour, 13 November 1922.

65. Ibid., minute by E.A. Crowe, 13 November 1922.

66. Ibid., minute by Curzon, 13 November 1922.

67. PRO, FO 371/7313, A7062/4517/45, minute by E.A. Crowe, 24 November 1922.

68. PRO, FO 371/7313, A7514/4517/45, Colonial Office to E.A. Crowe, Foreign Office, 11 December 1922.

69. Ibid., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, a 'Memorandum on the Question of Canadian Representation in Washington from the Foreign Office Point of View', December 1922.

70. Ibid.

71. PRO, FO 371/8524, A6071/3292/45, minute by Curzon, 11 October 1923.

72. PRO, FO 371/9627, A1836/1638/45, minute by E. Warner, 13 March 1924.

73. Ibid., minute by H.F. Adam, 14 March 1924.

74. Ibid., minute by W. Tyrrell, 14 March 1924.

75. Ibid., minute by E.A. Crowe, 14 March 1924.

76. Ibid., minute by R. Macdonald, 16 March 1924.

77. Ibid., Foreign Office memorandum, no date, but forwarded to the Colonial Office, 28 May 1924.

78. PRO, FO 371/9627, A3167/1638/45, minute by R.H. Campbell, 26 May 1924.

79. Ibid., letter appointing the Irish Free State Representative from the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to the United States, 24 June 1924.

80. PRO, FO 371/9627, A2890/1638/45, minute by H.F. Adam, 9 May 1924.

81. Ibid.

82. PRO, FO 371/10650, A3741/3166/45, minute by A. Chamberlain, 20 July 1925.

83. PRO, FO 371/11193, A5800/977/45, minute by A. Chamberlain on meeting with Mackenzie King, 9 November 1926.

CHAPTER 4

THE AWAKENING CONSCIOUSNESS: 1922-1923

The collapse of the Lloyd George Coalition in October 1922 ushered in two years of instability in British politics. The first phase of instability came with the two short-lived Conservative ministries from 1922 to 1923. The second phase of instability occurred with Labour's ten months rule in 1924. Although the Conservative administrations of 1922-23, the first headed by Andrew Bonar Law and the second by Stanley Baldwin, were brief, they presided over developments which redirected and changed forever the character of Anglo-Canadian relations. The two crucial developments at this time were the signing of the Halibut Treaty and the Imperial Conference of 1923. The Halibut Treaty marked the first occasion when Canada signed an international agreement without the co-signature of Britain. At the Imperial Conference of 1923 the Dominions were granted the right to negotiate and sign their own treaties. From the Canadian perspective these developments meant that Britain had abandoned attempts to maintain a unified foreign policy. From the British perspective, however, the consequences were by no means as decisive. Indeed, 1923 was a watershed in imperial relations as far as Canada was concerned. British politicians and Whitehall, however, were less enthusiastic about this independent signing power. Britain showed its lack of enthusiasm by distinguishing between the types of treaties that would come under this concession. Independent signing power applied to technical treaties but not political. It was through this interpretation of the agreement regarding

treaties that Whitehall hoped to preserve imperial unity.

Bonar Law's Ministry:

Andrew Bonar Law and the Conservatives were swept into power in the General Election of November 1922. Bonar Law's term as Prime Minister ended prematurely in May, 1923 when he resigned after being diagnosed as having throat cancer, from which he subsequently died in 1923. Bonar Law's ministry was unremarkable. Hankey, although biased because of his loyalties to Lloyd George, noted that, 'Except in Lord Curzon... I have not seen a spark of ability anywhere else. Stanley Baldwin hardly speaks. The Duke of Devonshire looks like an apoplectic idol and adds little counsel. The rest - except possibly but doubtfully Amery and Lloyd Greame - are second rate.'¹ Austen Chamberlain, the future Foreign Secretary who was not in the Cabinet, was equally concerned about the lack of strong men in the Cabinet but chose to reserve his praise for Devonshire not Curzon.²

The appointment of the Duke of Devonshire, a former Governor General of Canada, 1916-1921, as Colonial Secretary initially appeared beneficial for Canada. Certainly, it inspired the Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, to record: 'I think it a good appointment so far as Canada is concerned.'³ But while Devonshire may have possessed more of an interest, or, a greater knowledge than most of Canada, he was not a formidable force in the Colonial Office. Peter Larkin, the Canadian High Commissioner for Canada in London, wrote to King of a meeting with Devonshire:

There is such a difference in dealing with the Duke of Devonshire and Mr. Churchill - both remarkably nice - but one bovine and

the other like a race-horse.

...After leaving the Duke this morning I could not help thinking, coming down 'from the sublime', that he feels towards me as Queen Victoria used to feel towards Mr. Gladstone - that I preached at him, and I don't think he likes being preached at, but we are the best of friends.⁷

Although affable, Devonshire was a weak force, and once again, with the Prime Minister's disinterest in imperial relations, developments in Anglo-Canadian relations were directed from the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office, with the Foreign Office dominating events. Devonshire carried on in the Colonial Office when Stanley Baldwin startled many political observers by succeeding Bonar Law at 10 Downing Street.

Baldwin's Ministry:

Despite the sudden change in Prime Ministers, Anglo-Canadian relations were not harmed because the most influential offices, those of the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office, did not undergo a change in leadership.

Baldwin, a man perceived as possessing moderate intelligence and no political sparkle, rose quietly but steadily in political circles. He began his career as the Parliamentary Private Secretary to Bonar Law, 1916-17. He then moved to the Treasury where he was joint and later sole Financial Secretary until 1921 when he entered the Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade. It was in Bonar Law's Cabinet that Baldwin became Chancellor of the Exchequer, which set the stage for him to become Prime Minister. Baldwin, for all his lack of lustre, became a Conservative leader with staying power, heading two more ministries, one from 1924-29 and another from 1935-37. Loring Christie, more perceptive

than most of Baldwin's colleagues, wrote of Baldwin, 'He is not the man for brilliant improvisations, which is no harm. ...[He has qualities] that he will grow with any job. His opponents in his own and other parties are, I am bold enough to believe, prone to underestimate him.'⁵

Although Baldwin's first ministry was short lived, it was full of developments in British-Canadian relations. The Halibut Treaty and the Imperial Conference of 1923 brought the British and Canadian Governments to confront the terms of their relationship. Apart from these confrontations, the consecutive Conservative ministries were the first to deal with Mackenzie King, who was decisive in forcing changes in British-Canadian relations. Early encounters with King proved difficult ones for those in Whitehall to whom Baldwin passed the burden of solving the problems. That Baldwin had no interest in imperial affairs was highlighted by the contrast with Mackenzie King's enthusiasm for dealing with affairs of imperial unity.

Mackenzie King: The Awakening of a Canadian Nationalist

The struggle between Turkish nationalists and the Greeks in the Chanak Crisis of 1922, from the Canadian perspective, marked a new departure in Anglo-Canadian relations. This episode exposed an inescapable reality to Canadian nationalists that, despite all the discussions of Canada's right and role in the formulation of imperial foreign policy, Britain retained the power to embroil the country in international affairs, whether Canada wished it or not. The reaction in Ottawa to the Chanak Crisis reflected new attitudes in governing circles and a new vision of imperial

relations. Nowhere was this new approach in Canadian relations with Britain more evident than in Canada's new Prime Minister, Mackenzie King.

In the general election of December, 1921, Mackenzie King, who succeeded Wilfrid Laurier as leader of the Liberal Party in 1919, led his party to victory over Arthur Meighen and the Conservative Party. King, however, failed to achieve a majority and was left to lead the first minority government since Confederation. The electorate gave King two successive minority governments from 1921 until 1926, when he won his first majority. These minority governments, together with the general election of 1926, prompted by the King-Byng Crisis, marked these years with a reputation for high political turmoil.

At the beginning of King's first term in office, few would have predicted that he would become the country's longest serving Prime Minister and the one who would reshape Anglo-Canadian relations. King's political colleagues were interested primarily in King's actions in domestic affairs. King's colleagues, however, lacked interest in external affairs. King, therefore, freely set the agenda for the conduct of imperial affairs.⁶ It was not until the Chanak Crisis in 1922, however, that King's determined imperial policy began to take shape. In many respects, his action in the Chanak Crisis and afterwards caught his British counterparts off guard as they knew relatively little about the man. Throughout this period, King was to remain an unpredictable factor.

King was forty-seven years of age in 1921 when his party came to power. King had four degrees from Toronto and

Harvard, and his association with the Canadian Government went back over two decades from his first entry into the dominion civil service in 1900. He became a deputy minister only a short time after joining the dominion government in the newly-founded Department of Labour. There, he earned the reputation of being an effective conciliator in industrial disputes. In 1908, his first venture into political waters proved fruitful as he won a seat in the general election. In 1909, he joined Laurier's Government as Minister of Labour. This political sojourn ended abruptly in the general election of 1911 when the Liberal Government was defeated. King suffered personal defeat by losing his seat in Parliament. At this juncture, accepting an offer from the Rockefeller Foundation, the future Prime Minister crossed the border to head the Foundation's Department of Industrial Relations. Many powerful people, including John D. Rockefeller Jr., befriended King and he did much to keep the American mines and factories operating during the Great War. Upon the conclusion of the war, King was faced with the crucial decision of remaining in the United States or returning to politics in Canada. He chose the latter and upon the death of Sir Wilfrid Laurier in 1919 became leader of the Liberal Party.

Becoming Liberal leader and then the Prime Minister, King publicly appeared an intelligent, talented negotiator with political acumen. There was little awareness, either among his colleagues or within British circles, of his determination to free Canada from the constraints and responsibilities of a unified imperial policy. Indeed, King's actions gave no clue as to his imperial agenda until the Chanak Crisis in 1922.

Understanding King's motivation in imperial matters, like

understanding the man himself, has eluded most historians. He possessed a multi-layered personality. The obvious temptation for commentators is to weigh heavily the legacy of his grandfather, William Lyon Mackenzie, leader of the abortive rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada, and to conclude that King was fulfilling the aspirations of his grandfather to free Canada of British interference. During the election campaign of 1926, King referred to a consciousness that he was concluding the action initiated by his grandfather in Anglo-Canadian relations.⁷ In conjunction with this theme, historians have advanced the theory which views King, through his work and friendships, as a pro-American politician who wanted to link Canada more closely with the United States and move away from the Anglo-Canadian relationship. Both considerations are vital factors, but do not necessarily mean that King was motivated by anti-British sentiment alone. True, he neither commanded the respect nor had the circles of friends which Borden enjoyed in Britain, and he remained defensive that British motivation in its relations with Canada was based on centralising aspirations. Sensitive though King was to any slight from Britain, whether tangible or not, King was pro-British, not pro-American, and actually 'admired British ways, coveted British approval, and was devoted to the British connection.'⁸

King's chief motivation in wishing to secure Canada's freedom from unified imperial policy came from a desire to have Canada able to chose for itself its involvement in international entanglements. He espoused a doctrine, which has been termed 'uncomplicated' and 'naive'⁹, that international affairs could be resolved through conciliation.

He therefore regarded the League of Nations as the prime agency for negotiation. In practice, King gave little support to the League of Nations and was primarily motivated by the desire to avoid any international commitments at all costs.¹⁰ 'He made it [this international view] his own to the degree that his ideal of national unity based on reason, compromise and resolution of contradictions has become a synonym for Canadianism.'¹¹

In some ways, King was more Borden's successor than Meighen was in the imperial context. Both King and Borden shared the wish to increase Canada's status, whereas Meighen did not. Unfortunately, while both Borden and King worked for a stronger Canadian voice, they differed over the purpose and forum for this voice. Borden believed that Canada had a role in the international arena and therefore he accepted the risk of commitment there; King, on the other hand, wished to avoid such international responsibilities. It was not Borden's vision of Canada's international obligations, but his assessment of the realities of Canada's relationship with Britain which put him out of step with the evolving conditions. King held the better understanding of relations between the two countries.

In 1923, in the aftermath of the Chanak Crisis, Borden tried to convince King that Britain would never commit Canada, or any other Dominion, to a treaty without its consent.¹² King rejected Borden's view and formulated his imperial policy accordingly. As hindsight has shown, King was right. He understood that despite the appearance of partnership, Canada had not secured an adequate voice in the conduct of foreign policy. Borden's view, that the solution rested in the

imperial framework through improved consultation, had become outdated within four years. Thus from the Chanak Crisis onward, the priority in Ottawa became one of distancing Canada from decisions made in the Foreign Office. This shift in thinking strengthened the growing gulf of misunderstanding between Ottawa and London and left Whitehall further behind in comprehending changes in Britain's relationship with Canada. In response to the new Canadian efforts to avoid commitment in imperial foreign policy, there emerged a new urgency in British circles that a mechanism be sought to preserve unified imperial policy. These endeavours came from different parts of Whitehall, and in different forms over the next several years. One of the first was devised by the Cabinet Secretariat, an unlikely source, and its eventual failure was a bad omen.

Hankey, the Cabinet Office and Dominion Consultation

In the years immediately following the war, some in Whitehall believed that one way of improving consultation might be through a broadened role for the Cabinet Secretariat. This was something Milner approved and indeed was optimistic about, since he regarded the head of the Secretariat, Maurice Hankey, as one of the few men interested in the issue of consultation. Hankey, who favoured involvement of the Cabinet Secretariat in the consultation process, did not share Milner's goal of shifting the responsibility for the Dominions from the Colonial Office to other departments. It was for this reason that he opposed Dominion Prime Ministers being able to communicate directly with the British Prime Minister through cipher telegram; 'it would short circuit the Colonial

Office and dislocate the whole administrative machinery of government.¹³ Apart from this reservation, from 1919 until nearly the end of the Bonar Law ministry, Hankey championed the Cabinet Office's role in keeping the Dominions informed.

In the early 1920s, two criticisms were levelled at the Secretariat. First, this system, conceived in 1916 by Hankey and Lloyd George, might have been necessary to meet the demands of the war years, but in peacetime its large staff seemed a luxury. Second, among those who were particularly hostile to Lloyd George's 'Garden Suburb', the Secretariat appeared as yet another example of Britain being governed by an exclusive circle of advisers.¹⁴ This charge was somewhat unfair as Hankey had established a reputation as an efficient bureaucrat long before he created the Cabinet Office.

Maurice Hankey began his career with active service in the Royal Marine Artillery. His administrative life, for which he is most famous, began in 1908 when he became a Naval Assistant Secretary in the Admiralty's department of Naval Intelligence. In 1912, he left this post to become Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, a post he held until his retirement in 1938. It was the outbreak of the First World War which presented Hankey with the opportunity to broaden his administrative skills as he served as Secretary of the War Council, the Dardanelles Committee and the War Committee. When Lloyd George created his War Cabinet in 1916 and later, the Imperial War Cabinet, he appointed Hankey as secretary to both.¹⁵ These appointments marked the beginning of a Cabinet Secretariat which established a system for the recording of Cabinet conclusions, the distribution of Cabinet papers and various other administrative matters related to the smooth

running of Cabinet business. As the war years progressed, Hankey and his expanding staff seemed indispensable, and after the war the temporary organisation in the Cabinet Office continued. Hankey increased his administrative domain by serving as the Secretary to the British Delegation at the Versailles Conference and the Washington Conference together with other international conferences, as well as serving as the Secretary General for the various Imperial Conferences. This wide spectrum of involvement increased Hankey's influence - an influence resented in many quarters.

During the summer and autumn of 1922, Hankey came under sharp attack both in the press and in the House of Commons for his 'unconstitutional' power.¹⁶ The fate of the Secretariat appeared sealed when Bonar Law, who publicly declared that he intended to end the Cabinet Secretariat in 'its present form',¹⁷ became Prime Minister. The new Conservative Government attempted to place the Secretariat under the jurisdiction of the Treasury; Hankey successfully fought against this action. Not only did he succeed in preserving the Secretariat in its original state, but he also earned the additional position of Clerk of the Privy Council. This onslaught on the Secretariat was to be the last serious one, and Hankey went on to serve not only Bonar Law, but also Stanley Baldwin, Ramsay MacDonald and Neville Chamberlain.

The saga of Hankey and the Secretariat contained an imperial element in the years 1919-1922. Until the settlement of the Secretariat's crisis with Bonar Law, Hankey displayed a keenness to have that body assist in keeping the Dominions informed. In a memorandum written in November 1922 explaining and defending the tasks of the Cabinet Office, Hankey

emphasised its vital capacity in consultation with the Dominions by its ability to distribute appropriate Cabinet material. It noted the satisfaction these arrangements evoked among Dominion Prime Ministers. The document went one step further and attempted to portray the Cabinet Office as one on which the Dominions had pinned their hopes for the promised development in imperial relations. 'The feature to which the Prime Ministers of the Dominions attach importance is the status of the Cabinet Secretariat immediately under the Prime Minister. Their hopes and their beliefs in this Office as an organ of possible Imperial development along the lines of the resolution of 1918, which were re-affirmed in 1921, would be shattered if the Cabinet Secretariat were placed under the Treasury.'¹⁸ While the evidence is scanty, it suggests that this particular argument was not a major factor in the continuance of the Cabinet Secretariat. Moreover, once the future of the Secretariat was assured, Hankey lost interest in using the Cabinet Secretariat as a solution to the problem of consultation with the Dominions.

Excluded from his memorandum was the other imperial vision Hankey had harboured since the Imperial War Cabinet and the Versailles Conference. He had been impressed, as were many British officials and politicians, by the display of imperial unity which the structure of the British Empire Delegation appeared to give. Hankey keenly advocated that this structure be duplicated in London but with an Imperial Cabinet and an Imperial Office which would be staffed with a permanent Minister from each Dominion. Under this scheme, the Imperial Office would be located within the structure of the Cabinet Office.¹⁹ The placing of permanent Dominion

representatives in London to sustain constant consultation was not exclusive to Hankey. Hankey's enthusiasm for the proposals may have lacked the sincerity of others as it waned once the Cabinet Secretariat's future was secure, so that the Secretariat ceased to be a major player in resolving the question of consultation with the Dominions.

Before another plan for improved consultation could be mooted, another event occurred which strained the fragile bonds of imperial unity. In the absence of some definitive understanding about the future of imperial relations, Canada's involvement in the Halibut Treaty of 1923 pushed diplomatic imperial unity one step closer towards disintegration.

The Halibut Treaty of 1923

Tempting though it is to regard the Halibut Treaty as a tidy, self-contained episode which marks the end of imperial unity, and therefore the end of the Empire and the beginning of the Commonwealth, such a view would leave the imperial story incomplete. Certainly in 1923, the Canadian Government took the view that the treaty established Canada's right to self-determination in foreign affairs. Ensuing events confirmed this conviction. The British, however, were reluctant to draw this obvious conclusion. In 1923, Whitehall considered the treaty a serious threat to imperial unity because the British Government, and particularly the Foreign Office, had not reached a clear appreciation of the new relationship with Canada. Yet again, this episode highlights the confusion, misunderstanding, and struggle between the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office. This time, however, a new complication arose within the Foreign Office as two

opposing schools of thought emerged over the direction of imperial relations. One group of officials regarded this as the end of unity. The other group viewed the treaty as an exception and thus imperial unity continued. The Halibut Treaty did not resolve the question of imperial unity for officials in Whitehall; but it demonstrated how far British thinking had fallen behind Canadian regarding the evolution of imperial relations.

Preliminaries

Discussions between Canada and the United States regarding the ocean fisheries off the Pacific coast of North America had been intermittent since 1917. Although two treaties regulating the fishing of salmon and halibut had been concluded, the inability of the United States to resolve the conflict between federal and state jurisdictions left the treaties unendorsed and the fishing question unresolved. It was for this reason that in late December 1922, the Foreign Office was pleased to hear from its Ambassador at Washington, Sir Auckland Geddes, that the Canadian and United States Governments had undertaken negotiations with a view to concluding a convention.²⁰ The Foreign Office neither resented nor believed that Canada was stepping outside its jurisdiction in conducting the negotiations. The practice of Canada negotiating directly with the United States was accepted, as it was understood a British representative always signed the treaty.

The first intimations of potential conflict between Britain and Canada came in late January when Geddes informed the Foreign Office of the modifications to the agreement

Canada desired. The Canadian Government wanted the authorization required to bring the convention into effect to come from the Canadian Parliament, and requested various changes in the title of the treaty to indicate this.²¹ The Foreign Office, accepting the views of Maurice Peterson, foresaw difficulties if Great Britain were excluded from the title, and decided to avoid such a 'dilemma' by having no title for the agreement.²² These tactics failed when Lord Byng, the Canadian Governor-General, conveyed the wish of his government that the title of the convention read a 'Convention between Canada and United States'. Byng also requested that Ernest Lapointe, the Canadian Minister for Marine and Fisheries, be granted full powers to sign the agreement alone. These requests initiated a debate in Whitehall. Although eventually the question of signature became the dominant issue, initial attention was focused on the title.²³

The issue of title

Reaction in the Foreign Office to the Canadian request for a change in title gave an indication of the arguments which would arise over the question of signature. The decisive opinion came from George Mounsey in the Treaty Department. He repudiated the examples, those from a 1921 'Trade Agreement between Canada and France' and a 1922 'Convention of Commerce between Canada and France', presented by the Colonial Office in support of the Canadian request concerning the title, as 'bad precedents'. Mounsey opposed any title which excluded Great Britain. 'The Treaty is not between Canada and the United States, it is between 'The United States of America and His Majesty George V' etc., which

should, I think be altered to the usual form of 'His Majesty The King of the United Kingdom' etc...' He, like Peterson, favoured omitting the title.²⁴ The Foreign Office decided to follow Mounsey's recommendation.

The Colonial Office, conveying this message to Canada, inquired if these arrangements were agreeable to the Canadian Government. Foreign Office officials were infuriated when they learned of this action. R. Sperling, an Assistant Secretary in the Foreign Office, noted: 'It was not our intention to invite objections. We said that we should give the treaty a certain title in the treaty series and the King's titles for use in treaties are, I understand, laid down by statute.'²⁵ Mounsey agreed and believed that the Colonial Office 'should be taken to task.'²⁶ Sperling wrote a curt letter from the Foreign Office expressing the hope that the 'Canadian Government will not avail themselves of the opportunity offered by the private and personal telegram. ...Lord Curzon considers it essential that [regarding HM Ambassador signing too] the procedure laid down in my letter of February 10th should be strictly adhered to.'²⁷ The issue of the title did not proceed much further because attention in Whitehall was diverted to the more serious question of signature.

The issue of signature

The Canadian request to be sole signatory on the Halibut Treaty brought the Colonial and Foreign Office once again into conflict. From the beginning the Colonial Office supported the Canadian Government's wish to sign the treaty alone. The Foreign Office opposed the action on two grounds: first, on

the theoretical level, a Monarch whose realm was one unit could not be broken up into the King of Canada and the King of the United Kingdom; second, and more strenuously maintained, was the fear of causing a breach of imperial diplomatic unity.

The Colonial Office saw no constitutional threat in the Canadian request and recalled discussions surrounding a similar instance, the Boundary Waters Treaty in 1921. It too had been an agreement negotiated between Canada and the United States. Also at that time the issue of having the Canadian representative sign alone arose. The Colonial Office reminded the Foreign Office of a letter which it received in 1921 from H.W. Malkin, a Legal Adviser in the Foreign Office, who conceded that such action would not pose a constitutional threat. Malkin also wrote of his meeting with Loring Christie, Legal Adviser in the Canadian Department of External Affairs, on the possibility of a Canadian Minister alone signing the treaty. In the end, the two men reached a vague agreement that if it was made plain in the preamble that only Canadian legislation could enact the convention, Malkin would encourage the Foreign Office to accept a Canadian minister signing alone and he felt the department would concede the point.²⁸

The example of 1921 did not persuade the Foreign Office to change its mind. In support of its position was the fact that the Water Boundary Treaty had never reached ratification and so no precedent had been set. In early February 1923, Sperling argued that to allow Canada to sign alone would undermine the British Ambassador's status and the concept of the Empire as a single entity. Continuing the argument

originally formulated by Mounsey, he observed that

Canada professes not to regard HM Ambassador as representing the Canadian Government and formally claims a right to conduct negotiations with a foreign Power independent of His Majesty's Government. The fact is, of course, that the Ambassador represents the King and not any particular part of the Empire; without however going into the constitutional position we can say that the omission of the Ambassador's signature to a formal Convention between a Dominion and a foreign Power is unprecedented.

Sperling observed that in the instances of Canadian-French and Canadian-Italian agreements, Sir Auckland Geddes, as the representative of the British Government, had conducted the final negotiations. Sperling was unequivocal in stating that Geddes should sign the treaty.²⁹ This sentiment was relayed in a telegram to Geddes from the Foreign Office, informing him 'in accordance with usage, you, in your capacity of Representative of HM, should append your signature first, as this was a treaty between 'the United States of America and HM, and not the United States of America and the Government of Canada'.³⁰

The Colonial Office continued its fight. In a letter which accompanied a copy of Devonshire's telegram to Byng of 16 February 1923, E.J. Harding, Assistant Secretary, referred to the Sockeye Salmon Fisheries Convention of 1919 and Lord Milner's opinion at that time saying that, 'if the Canadian plenipotentiary had signed the Treaty alone there was no constitutional reason why he should not be the sole signatory of the Treaty on behalf of His Majesty.'³¹ The Foreign Office remained firm. Peterson referred to the example of the Sockeye Salmon Fisheries Convention as an episode from which the Foreign Office had learnt a lesson.

We have perhaps hitherto taken a stronger line in this instance than that which was determined on in connection with the expressed desire of the Canadian Government to sign the proposed substitute for the Rush-Bagot Agreement without the intervention of HM's Ambassador. In that case, it was decided to leave the United States Government to raise the necessity for the association of a representative of HM's Government in the signature. Nevertheless, I venture to think that we should maintain our attitude in present circumstances [that a British representative also sign to show the consent of the British monarch]....³²

H. Ritchie in the Treaty Department supported Peterson's views. Reviewing the terms of all treaties between the King and foreign countries, he reiterated that established practice dictated that the King was represented by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and abroad by his diplomatic representative. He accused the Canadians of setting aside 'established practice' because of erroneous 'misapprehensions' on their part, that 'the convention is not between The King and the United States, but in some special sense between Canada and that country: that our Ambassador at Washington is not The King's Ambassador but in some special sense the Ambassador of the United Kingdom: and that The King's Full Powers to Sir A. Geddes to sign treaties on HM's behalf are insufficient or can be ignored.'³³ Both the Foreign Office and Canada appreciated the challenge that Canada's request represented. Strangely, however, the Foreign Office failed to recognise that Canada was tenaciously pursuing this action. Perhaps this blindness explains in part why the Foreign Office, having issued strong statements, unexpectedly reversed its position and allowed Canada to sign alone.

On 1 March 1923 the Colonial Office forwarded to the Foreign Office a copy of Byng's telegram³⁴, dated the 28

February, stating that on 1 March Lapointe would travel to Washington to sign the treaty alone.³⁵ The Canadians justified this rapid action on the ground that they wanted the Treaty ratified before the United States Senate recessed on 4 March. This sudden acceleration of events forced the Foreign Office to move quickly. Within hours of receiving the copy of Byng's telegram the Foreign Office, in a complete reversal of its previous stance, sent instructions to Geddes that he was to permit Lapointe to sign alone. In this fashion, at the last moment, the Foreign Office permitted Canada to establish a precedent and breach imperial diplomatic unity. Explaining why the Foreign Office should have acted this way is not easy. One clue can be found in the instructions the Foreign Office gave Geddes to allow Lapointe alone to sign. Officials may have hoped that in yielding on this point, they could prevent Canada from pursuing separate representation at Washington. In the telegram to Geddes, the Foreign Office revealed, '[Mackenzie King] hints...if this concession was made to Canadian sentiment, his hands would be strengthened in resisting or at least combating the proposal to appoint a permanent separate Canadian plenipotentiary.'³⁶ Anxious as the Foreign Office was to avoid separate Canadian representation at Washington, this explanation is not convincing. After all the forthright minutes and memoranda on the assault on sovereignty and the principle of a unified imperial foreign policy, how could these be set aside because of a vague intimation from Mackenzie King that he would not pursue separate representation for Canada at Washington? Geddes's telegram to the Foreign Office, 2 March 1923, reflected his apprehension about the Foreign Office's reversal

of action. Writing to confirm that Lapointe had signed the treaty alone on 2 March 1923, he concluded: 'I fear that an unfortunate precedent has been created and I am doubtful whether concession made will have any permanent influence on Canadian Government as regards separate representation at Washington.'³⁷

Another insight into the Foreign Office's thinking can be found in the concluding segment of its instructions to Geddes. Here an attempt was made to rationalise the fact that its decision to allow Canada to sign had not in any way compromised principles of treaty-making or the sovereignty of the King. It had been effected 'Without abandoning the general principle that British Treaties with the United States must be signed by the plenipotentiary representing The King as sovereign of the whole British Empire, and without derogating from your supreme authority.'³⁸

Comprehending the change of heart by the Foreign Office becomes even more difficult when, only four days after the signing of the treaty, a minute by Sperling resumed the debate regarding sovereignty and the maintenance of imperial diplomatic unity. His minute is remarkable. In its pessimistic tones, it foreshadows the harsh reality that Whitehall would eventually have to contemplate. He argued that in granting Lapointe the powers to sign alone, the principle of a unified imperial foreign policy had been compromised. 'The precedent created may have some very troublesome consequences. If Dominion Governments are free to sign and negotiate treaties with foreign Powers, the occasion must arise sooner or later when HMG will approve some treaty proposed by a Dominion and the Secretary of State for Foreign

Affairs will feel unable to advise the Crown to issue full powers for its signature.' The only option left to Britain, concluded Sperling, was to grant full control of foreign policy to the Dominions. However, with a touch of condescension, he predicted that this outwardly bleak outcome might be the only means of salvaging imperial unity. 'When the Dominion realizes that it is being offered the choice of becoming an independent second or third class Power with the privilege of paying for its own independence, or of remaining part of a first class Power, it will probably become more tractable.'³⁹

Both Mounsey and William Tyrrell, Assistant Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office, disagreed with Sperling's commitments. Their strong disdain for Sperling's assessment makes his minute the more remarkable and their assumptions more feeble and implausible. Mounsey tried to shrug off the concession of signing power to Canada as merely an 'embarrassing' action whose potential as a troublesome precedent could be disregarded because it was 'the thin edge of the wedge'. It was, after all, a treaty concerned only with local matters. He also dismissed Sperling's prediction of the difficulty the British Government would face when a Dominion concluded an agreement Britain could not support. Mounsey was satisfied that so long as the Foreign Secretary referred matters to the King then imperial diplomatic unity could be protected.

Assuming, however, that a Dominion government acquires the degree of independence in its relations with foreign states foreshadowed by Mr. Sperling, the Colonial Office could not according to present practice, submit direct to the King an Order in Council of the Dominion

Government requesting full powers for its Minister to sign a treaty, but would ask the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to take this action; thus presumably entitling the Secretary of State to satisfy himself that the contents of the proposed treaty were in no way injurious⁴⁰ to the rest of the Empire before deciding to recommend HM to grant the full powers.⁴⁰

Mounsey's thinking was flawed concerning the issue of Sovereignty and who advised the Sovereign. If Canada, or any Dominion, defined the monarch in the capacity as Sovereign of that nation, then the Sovereign had to accept the advice of His Ministers in Canada. How could the Foreign Secretary for Britain intervene on advice given to the Sovereign of Canada by his Canadian advisers? This was, after all, what happened with the acceptance of Canadian advice. Mounsey failed, also, to explore what the ramifications of this precedent would be. He was content to fool himself that nothing drastic had happened. Tyrrell, concurring with Mounsey, was more willing to acknowledge that relations had changed for the worse. 'I suppose we shall have to go on living from hand to mouth but Mr. Sperling is quite right in pointing out the awkwardness of our relations.'⁴¹ Crowe noted of the difficulties: 'I think it is fully realized.' Curzon did not forward an opinion, choosing only to initial the exchange of minutes.⁴²

Initially, Sperling's pessimistic predictions of what the Halibut Treaty precedent represented were swept aside. Many in the Foreign Office tried to see Canada's action as an exception and not one that furthered the evolution of an independent Canadian foreign policy. They believed that nothing had changed, and that even the Canadians were backing away from the potential precedent-setting act. This hope appeared in a minute by Peterson on Canadian press clippings.

'The Canadian press', wrote Peterson in late May, 'appears to have modified its view as to the advantages to be derived from the independent signature of the Canadian Minister. A note of apprehension is struck in the later extracts.'⁴³ Quickly, however, Sperling's concerns that Great Britain could be placed in an awkward position internationally by a Dominion's action were realised in the aftermath of the Halibut Treaty.

Conflict over publication of correspondence

The first intimations of the difficulty Britain might face appeared when the Canadian Government tabled in the Canadian House of Commons, without the permission from Whitehall, the correspondence relating to the Halibut Treaty. Foreign Office officials were annoyed because the correspondence contained private and personal telegrams. They feared an international breach in diplomatic practice and potential damage to their relationship with the United States. This behaviour of the Canadian Government confirmed the British belief that the Canadians were ignorant and ill-equipped in conducting themselves in the international arena. The Canadian's behaviour also gave the British concern about how this would reflect on Britain.

Initially, Canada sought permission from the Colonial Office in mid-March to publish correspondence relating to the Halibut Treaty. At that time the department assumed that private and personal telegrams would not be published.⁴⁴ Geddes, the British Ambassador in Washington, was consulted. He recommended approval be given for the correspondence between the Embassy and Ottawa, with the proviso that all references regarding the question of signature were omitted.

He also promised to consult the United States Government about their notes. Before Geddes had a chance to do this, he was informed by Byng that the Canadian Government had gone ahead, without receiving an answer from the Colonial Office, and published the correspondence.

Byng sent a lengthy explanation of the action, accompanied with a letter from Mackenzie King giving his version of the events.⁴⁵ Geddes was disturbed to learn that letters from the United States Government were included. The British Ambassador immediately sought the permission of the Foreign Office to smooth over any difficulties that might be created with the United States.⁴⁶ Sperling, an Assistant Secretary in the Foreign Office, was not anxious to give Geddes approval to speak to the United States immediately, believing it wise to delay any action.⁴⁷ Tyrrell, an Assistant Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office, overruled Sperling. Tyrrell, lashing out at Mackenzie King's reply as 'a poor excuse for a such a breach of international etiquette,'⁴⁸ approved granting Geddes permission to contact American officials.

By early April, Geddes still had not received instructions to apologise to the United States as an agreement could not be reached in Whitehall. Although during the second week of April, the Colonial Office forwarded to the Foreign Office Byng's telegram of 17 March, the matter dragged on. In the middle of May, the Colonial Office sent to the Foreign Office the series of letters exchanged between Byng, his private secretary, A.F. Sladen, and Mackenzie King. The Colonial Office endorsed, moreover, Byng's advice to allow the controversy over the publication of correspondence to be

quietly dropped. The Foreign Office took offence both at Byng's suggestion and King's incomprehension that he had breached international etiquette. Peterson felt that King's lack of appreciation of the seriousness of his action highlighted the inadequacies of Canadian experience in the ways of international affairs. He endorsed the view that Geddes should be instructed to apologise, if only informally, to the United States.⁴⁹ Sperling now, too, supported an apology. 'I think that is the least we can do. An incident of this sort can scarcely be treated as if it had not happened -- as suggested by Lord Byng.'⁵⁰ Tyrrell concurred that Geddes should apologise if the Colonial Office approved. R.G. Vansittart, an official in the Foreign Office, seeking this approval, took the opportunity to criticise the actions both of King and Byng. 'You will notice Mackenzie King's letters...show no realisation that the susceptibilities of the United States Government have in any way to be taken into account, while Lord Byng's suggestion that the whole matter should be treated as though it had never taken place, seems to us quite impracticable.'⁵¹

The Colonial Office tried to prevent Geddes apologising to the United States by citing an example from 1883 which suggested the United States might publish correspondence without permission. As a concession, however, the Colonial Office requested that the King Government always be consulted before Geddes acted.⁵² The Foreign Office agreed, but could not resist refuting the Colonial Office's example and condemning yet again the Canadian action. 'The fact remains however', wrote Vansittart to Marsh in the Colonial Office, 'that such publication is contrary to the universally

recognised rule of intercourse between nations....'⁵³

The matter was finally resolved in June when Geddes, with permission from the Canadian Government, informally apologised to the United States. The Foreign Office harboured a degree of resentment that it had been left to clean up the mess caused by the Canadian Government.⁵⁴ The incident, moreover, provided ammunition for the growing school of thought in the Foreign Office that the vital question was not preserving diplomatic unity, but protecting the British Government from commitments which came from a Dominion's independent action. This school of thought, not yet universal in the Foreign Office, was gaining in influence, and its exponents directed much of the Foreign Office's thinking during the Imperial Conference of 1923. The impact of this influential group on the Imperial Conference of 1923 won support from Curzon, the Foreign Secretary, who feared that Britain might be obligated, without consent or consultation, by Dominion international actions.

Post-Halibut Treaty: New Reflections on Dominions and Treaties

After his success with the Halibut Treaty, Mackenzie King recorded his assessment of imperial relations in his diary. He wrote of his sense of destiny with respect to the direction Canada must take in imperial relations. The Halibut Treaty was more than a commercial agreement because it possessed distinct political overtones for the Canadian Prime Minister. King viewed this treaty as part of his wider objective that Canada must only be drawn into international issues, peace and war, and international commitments, through her own choice and her own participation in the negotiations.⁵⁵ King predicted

this would bring him into conflict with the British authorities because he was challenging the very basis of imperial diplomatic unity. He prepared for the Imperial Conference of 1923 and a probable British counter-attack aimed at reversing any precedent set by the Halibut Treaty. King noted his belief that Whitehall would seek to ensure that imperial foreign policy remained intact and capable of enveloping Canada in international conflict without consultation or approval.⁵⁶ He was determined to fight and was buttressed in this resolve by his staunch supporter, O.D. Skelton, the Dean of Arts at Queen's University, Kingston, who accepted King's invitation to attend the conference.⁵⁷

King's determination to use the Halibut treaty as the means of reshaping Anglo-Canadian relations in the realm of foreign affairs was recognised in British circles. His calm satisfaction, mixed with the determination to protect his gain, was not however matched in the Colonial and Foreign Offices. Reaction both within and between the two departments was diverse and fluctuating, with the greater uncertainty occurring in the Foreign Office. Initially, Foreign Office officials attempted to dismiss the Halibut Treaty as an unfortunate exception. Next came their recognition that imperial unity was under siege. Finally, opinion in the Foreign Office sharply divided over whether their efforts should concentrate on devising a scheme to maintain imperial unity on critical matters in foreign policy, such as political treaties, or, alternatively, whether officials should resign themselves to the end of unity. The Foreign Office and the Colonial Office shared a new consciousness of and urgency about Anglo-Canadian relations. The Foreign Office

initially rejected any precedent that might have been created by the Halibut Treaty and dismissed the circumstances of its signature as an unfortunate 'experiment'⁵⁸. Through an exploration of technicalities, Foreign Office officials attempted to convince themselves that imperial unity was intact. Several accepted Canada's sole signature because it only pertained to matters of 'purely local concern'⁵⁹. They believed no precedent had been established which permitted Dominions to sign treaties alone when the issues involved imperial concerns. It was by these technical discriminations that the Foreign Office, and indeed the Colonial Office, tried to salvage unified imperial policy in the most significant aspect of diplomacy, that of political treaties: the making of peace and war.

Sir Cecil Hurst, an Assistant Under-Secretary and Legal Adviser in the Foreign Office, wrote a lengthy memorandum immediately after the signing of the Halibut Treaty. He, too, took consolation from the fact that the treaty was purely of local concern and moreover a commercial treaty, which did not reflect adversely upon imperial unity. The lesson he thought was to amend the weakness revealed in the imperial system, arising from an issue not lucidly defined. Hurst recommended that Whitehall should prepare in advance the response that might be used when a treaty's jurisdiction was unclear, since one Dominion might regard it as a local concern which it could handle alone, whereas Britain, or even other Dominions, might see the treaty as having imperial implications and thus needing imperial endorsement.⁶⁰

Hurst also identified the Crown as providing a technicality behind which the British Government could hide in

an effort to sustain imperial unity, if only for appearance's sake. He observed that so long as it remained vague on which ministers' advice, imperial or dominion, the Crown issued the power to make a treaty, and equally, so long as the Dominions continued to pass their requests through the official channel in Britain, then certainly in appearance, at least, imperial unity would be maintained.⁶¹

The theoretical examination of the Halibut Treaty and the consolation it brought was soon shattered by practical aspects of the treaty, as when the United States Senate attempted to extend its interpretation of the treaty to include all of the Empire. This action re-awakened fears within the Foreign Office that Britain might be bound by a treaty which it had no part in formulating. This new concern balanced against the desire to maintain imperial unity with respect to political treaties, provoked more examination in the Foreign Office in the months leading to the Imperial Conference of 1923.

In the summer of 1923, Foreign Office officials began to analyse closely the issue of the treaty-making powers of the Dominions. Evident in the series of minutes which followed was a growing awareness of the extent of the Dominions' powers and the reality that Britain possessed no authority to check their actions. Mixed with this increasing sense of dominion autonomy was the issue of responsibility. As mentioned above, Britain feared that it might be held responsible for a treaty which it did not negotiate. It is difficult to discern which consideration spurred the other. But even with these prevailing factors, Britain remained unwilling to accept an end to imperial foreign policy with respect to political treaties. This reluctance was displayed in the thinking

devoted to devising resolutions on the question for the Imperial Conference of 1923.

The British Government attempted to maintain the unity of imperial foreign policy on matters of declaring war and making peace by using subtle, and at times ambiguous, language and interpretation of jurisdiction. They made distinctions between a political versus commercial treaties, or local concern versus imperial concern. These distinctions were vital considerations. They also adopted into their discussions the word 'consultation' which really stood for unified imperial policy. In time, officials in the Foreign and Colonial Offices clung to the idea of consultation as the means to salvage imperial unity. They believed improved consultation would ensure ratification of the treaties by the Dominions. 'Consultation', however, applied only to political treaties. Britain's focus on consultation in political treaties failed to address the new circumstances created by the Halibut Treaty. Although to a large degree the British disregarded the events of the Halibut treaty, King persisted with his underlying desire to have Canada take control of its own declaration of war and its own making of peace. Once again, unknowingly, the British were falling behind the pace of constitutional evolution set by Canada.

Sir C. Hurst, together with a fellow Legal Adviser, H. Malkin, and a Counsellor, G. Mounsey, began in late July 1923 to study the question of the Dominions and treaty-making. They accepted that Dominions would go ahead and make treaties. It was, therefore, 'too late in the day'⁶² to reverse this process. Instead, they turned their attention to the matter of responsibility and keeping the Empire unified in the

international setting. They made light of the question of responsibility in these early stages. Foreign Office officials, particularly Malkin, could see no reason why the present procedure should not continue whereby the Foreign Office would be the medium of communication when a foreign government complained that a Dominion was not fulfilling its treaty obligations. Furthermore, if the Foreign Office believed that the Dominion was at fault, then it could raise the matter with that Dominion. The Foreign Office recognised that it had no actual power over the Dominions, and if the Dominions continued to press the point, the Foreign Office had 'no practical means of correcting them'⁶³. This lack of actual power did not concern officials; they consoled themselves that whenever conflicting views had arisen between the British Government and a Dominion regarding obligations within a treaty, they had found 'in the last resort that Dominions are usually reluctant to insist on a point of view in international relations which is not supported by the Home Government.'⁶⁴ The unwritten belief was that disunity in imperial foreign policy would be acknowledged only internally. Internationally, the Empire would appear unified. British priorities dictated that in matters of war the Empire remained united. It was essential, therefore, that Dominion treaty-making powers be defined to ensure when any part of the Empire was at war, then all of the Empire was at war.⁶⁵

The Colonial Office entered this debate by compiling a lengthy response to the Foreign Office proposal that the Dominions be granted limited powers to sign treaties applicable to themselves alone in commercial matters. The Colonial Office memorandum was shaped, like that of the

Foreign Office, by the Halibut treaty. It is interesting to observe that in the historical section, the bulk of the examples and actions which had propelled change in the negotiation of commercial treaties was brought about by Canadian action. Moreover, without the recent dispute over the Halibut treaty, the whole issue of treaties, both commercial and now political, would not have been undergoing examination.

Even though the Colonial Office shared the Foreign Office's objective of maintaining imperial unity in foreign policy, the two offices clashed over how to achieve this goal. The Foreign Office favoured the granting of limited signing powers so that only the Dominion concerned would have obligations to the agreement. Therefore the Foreign Office thought that in political treaties which affected more than one Dominion there would be a British Ambassador or representative signing along with the Dominions and thus imperial unity would be maintained. The Colonial Office opposed limiting Dominion signing powers in political treaties where it was the only imperial party concerned. Instead, in a complicated scheme, the Colonial Office divided potential treaties into two categories - technical and political. In technical treaties, the practice of issuing limited powers to the Dominion concerned should be continued. With political treaties, full signing powers should be issued to the Dominion in all instances, not just those of local concern. In other words, the Colonial Office supported the continuance of the Halibut's Treaty precedent, where the Canadian representative was issued full unlimited signing power. The Colonial Office thought that giving full unlimited signing powers to the

Dominions was one way to maintain unity in imperial foreign policy.

The Colonial Office believed that when a Dominion signed a treaty with full powers then in reality the Dominion would be signing on behalf of the Crown. The Colonial Office maintained that imperial diplomatic unity prevailed so long as a Dominion represented the Crown. The Crown, if the analogy of a human body may be employed, was one entity whose arm or leg could not be separated and act differently from its head. Furthermore, a treaty was signed in the name of His Majesty of the British Empire, not the monarch of specific regions, and therefore it did not matter whose signature, a Dominion or British minister, was on the treaty as it was all done as a representative of the crown of the British Empire and thus bound the entire British Empire.⁶⁶ It was on this issue of Dominion signing powers for political treaties that the Foreign Office and Colonial Office disagreed. The Foreign Office looked no further than the attempts of the United States Senate to interpret the Halibut treaty as being applicable to all the British Empire to recognise that difficulties had arisen because the British Government had not been careful in defining the terms of the signing power of the Canadian representative. While the Foreign Office was relieved that the United States Senate had not pursued its original interpretation, the potential dangers were not lost. This Foreign Office stance seemed progressive, since it recognised the independent status of the Dominions established after the war by their signatures on the Treaty of Versailles, among many of the peace treaties, and their membership in the League of Nations. It is impossible not to be slightly

cynical that the Foreign Office referred to these precedents, several years after the fact, because only now was it considered convenient to acknowledge them. Also, progressive as the Foreign Office suddenly appeared on the question of Dominion status, it could still write that matters of imperial concern required British participation. In the instances of treaties with imperial ramifications, the Dominion representative would receive full signing powers, but the treaty would be co-signed by a British Ambassador or representative.⁶⁷

Considering the sudden recognition of the independent status of the Dominions by the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office gave a more sobering evaluation of the separate signing powers accorded to the Dominions under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. The Colonial Office questioned how much independence the Dominions really had achieved when Lord Milner was able to sign various peace treaties on behalf of South Africa without having his power, beyond that of a representative of the British Government, extended. This questioning raised another issue that while much discussion was being focused around the Dominions' extensive powers, not as much was being devoted to Britain's diminishing power.

Sir Cecil Hurst, a Legal Adviser in the Foreign Office, took a rather damning view of the Colonial Office recommendations by observing that: 'After studying the memorandum, I am satisfied that it is historically incomplete, politically unsound and practically unworkable.'⁶⁸ He was particularly offended by the recommendation that a Dominion, signing an agreement on its own, should be granted full power. In fact, he was so disgusted that he ordered the cancellation

of a meeting organised between the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office to resolve the question. He decided that nothing of value could be contributed by the Colonial Office and that the matter was better left with the Foreign Office. Yet again, the Colonial Office found itself excluded while the Foreign Office sorted out the formal character of Dominion relations.⁶⁹

Apart from his damnation of the Colonial Office's ideas on treaty-making and the role of the Dominions, Hurst's minute is quite extraordinary. It reflects not only an amazing instinct over the direction which imperial relations with the Dominions would have to take in the future, but an interesting testament to the development of Hurst's own thinking. Only seven months earlier, he had suggested that imperial unity might potentially be salvaged by relying upon an ambiguous interpretation of the Crown.⁷⁰ By October, Hurst was no longer ambiguous on the role of the Crown and on whose advice the Crown acted in the matter of the Halibut treaty. Directly attacking the Colonial Office's definition of the Crown, as the all-enveloping Crown of the British Empire, Hurst now argued the constitutional case that the Crown took advice from different ministers according to the country involved. The Crown who headed the government in Canada took actions only on the advice of its Canadian ministers. As Hurst now claimed, this had always been the constitutional position of the Crown in theory; the difference was that since the First World War the theory had become practice as the Canadian ministers who advised the Crown were now the ministers responsible to the Parliament of Canada. Hurst's capacity to recognise that the Crown, although embodied in one physical person, was in theory

several crowns each of whom acted on the advice of a particular set of ministers, and that this was neither illogical nor unworkable, placed him ahead of most of his British colleagues. Unfortunately, for the majority in Whitehall, the riddle of one Crown responsible to several constituencies which could potentially come into conflict with each other remained a hindrance to resolving Anglo-Canadian relations.⁷¹

Hurst's memorandum also reflected a growing trend in the Foreign Office to recognise, several years after the fact, the advancement of the Dominions' status both in the final stages of the Great War and their membership in the League of Nations. Defining the practice established by these events as one where the British Empire now consisted as 'a community of free peoples under a common Sovereign', Hurst used this to argue that the Colonial Office's desire to grant the Dominions unrestricted signing powers ran counter to the independent status of the Dominions, since another Dominion could be bound without having been consulted. What Hurst chose not to state was that his argument prevented the British Government from being obligated.⁷²

As progressive as Hurst was in recognising the independent status of the Dominions, he remained optimistic that continued unity could be achieved, but only if proper steps of consultation were established. In a damning assessment of the current system, Hurst noted for the future,

Cordial consultation can only be ensured by frank recognition of the rights and obligations of the various portions of the Empire. It will certainly not be facilitated by the maintenance of paper restrictions or adherence to principles which served well in the past but which at

present are not likely to be acceptable to the Parliaments of the Dominions or to the ministers responsible to those Parliaments.⁷³

Hurst's belief that adequate consultation at this belated stage would save the day was incorrect. Recognition in 1923 that sufficient consultation was the only possible way to preserve imperial diplomatic unity seemed to be a repetition of the earlier scenario regarding attempts to maintain unity in imperial defence policy, particularly naval policy. Unfortunately, just as these tactics failed to save imperial defence, so too did they fail in imperial foreign policy. It would be some time before Whitehall recognised that its efforts had come too late as matters of Dominions' status had progressed beyond the point of no return.

Imperial Conference of 1923

The first Imperial Conference in two years was convened in the autumn of 1923. It was a critical turning-point in imperial relations as the British conceded treaty-making rights to the Dominions. While Whitehall had initially viewed such concessions as limited in scope and not harmful to imperial diplomatic unity, the implementation of the changes, especially by Canada, in the years after 1923, meant that imperial unity had been compromised.

As King predicted, the precedent of the Halibut Treaty became the focal point of discussion of foreign affairs at the Conference. Contrary to King's anticipation, however, the British Government allowed the precedent to stand and confirmed that the Dominion Governments had the right to negotiate and sign treaties of purely local concern without

consulting the British Government or having the treaty co-signed by a British Ambassador or representative. The confirmation came in the form of a resolution whose initiative Curzon, the Foreign Secretary, supported. Some historians have wrongly seen this action by the British Government as an acknowledgement that imperial unity in foreign policy was over.⁷⁴

Mackenzie King certainly viewed the resolutions passed at the Imperial Conference as marking the end of imperial unity. His determination to protect the precedent of the Halibut Treaty was facilitated by the lack of determination on the British side. In terms of preparation, Hankey, Secretary to the Cabinet, found it to be 'a deplorable spectacle compared with Lloyd George. It is the first time I have ever felt that the ability on the Dominions' side was superior to the British side of the table - except for Lord Curzon.'⁷⁵ The lack of talent in the British delegation, as suggested by Hankey, may have reflected a lack of interest.

Against the background of the British Cabinet's indifference to the question of imperial unity, dissension also brewed in the Foreign Office. Writers who have argued⁷⁶ that Curzon and King saw eye to eye on imperial relations in the realm of foreign policy may be quite close to the truth. The problem is that if Curzon agreed with King, his views were distant from those in his own department. As discussed earlier, Curzon's officials believed that unity had to be maintained in vital political agreements, such as those concerned with war and peace. They believed this maintenance might be achieved by dividing the agreements into various categories. The resolution from the Imperial Conference of

1923 granting independence to Dominions to make treaties of local concerns can be interpreted as signalling the end of imperial unity. It can also be interpreted as a Foreign Office attempt to preserve the unity in crucial matters by confining the Dominion Governments to local matters. Hindsight shows that the resolutions in 1923 did, in fact, mean the termination of unity, primarily because the phrase 'local concern' was left largely undefined and thus open to a wide spectrum of interpretation. Unfortunately, the Foreign Office officials did not foresee the impact of the resolutions and continued to explore the fragile concept of unity.

The need for maintaining this fragile concept of unity in political matters remained a high priority with Foreign Office officials. This concern reflected itself in many ways. Some wished to sustain publicly the image that the British Empire still operated as one cohesive body. This Foreign Office desire showed during discussions about publishing the Imperial Conference's resolutions. Contrary to the wishes of Dominion leaders, particularly Mackenzie King, the Foreign Office strongly opposed publication of the conference's resolutions. As one official noted, 'it was not contemplated nor is it I think desirable that the general attention of the world should be drawn to this position by the publication of the resolutions.'⁷⁷

In the months after the Imperial Conference, Foreign Office officials continued to work for the establishment of 'cordial consultation' with the Dominions. The difficulty was to devise the means of achieving this cordial consultation. One of the few recommendations came from Sir Eyre Crowe, the Permanent Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office, who, in a

more optimistic tone than his colleague Hurst, believed that it was feasible to encourage the placement of a Dominion representative in London, who would be empowered by his government to contribute his Dominion's view on foreign matters and thus the consequent policy would remain united as the proper consultation had been carried out.⁷⁸ Crowe proved too optimistic in supposing that all the Dominions, particularly Canada, would be willing to assist in the scheme. He was wrong, as many were, in assuming that Britain and Canada were working towards the same goal of preserving imperial unity in foreign affairs. It was this incorrect assumption which led the Foreign Office to try time and again to establish 'cordial consultation'. Recognition of the need for proper consultation came, like so many other components of the imperial relationship, too late in the process. British efforts continued, but again these were too little, too late. In the immediate years, the British made repeated endeavours to promote imperial consultation. Their next major initiative towards this goal came during the brief term of the first Labour Government in 1924.

1. Hankey Papers, Diaries, HNKY 1/5, 26 November 1922.
2. Charles Petrie, Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon Sir A. Chamberlain, vol. II, London, 1940, pp. 207-9.
3. NAC, King Diary, 26 October 1922.
4. NAC, King Papers, C2246, ff. 64733-4, Larkin to King, 24 November 1922.
5. NAC, Borden Papers, C4427, ff. 148107-112, Christie to Borden, 27 November 1924.

6. J.H. Thompson with A. Seager, Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord, Toronto, 1985, p. 42. There was a general disinterest in Canada regarding foreign affairs which was reflected in the business of the Canadian Parliament. Between the years 1920-1925, the House of Commons sat in session for 548 days; fewer than 14 days were devoted to discussions of all aspects of external affairs. This lack of interest gave King a free hand in the matter of external affairs.

7. NAC, King Diaries, 25 July 1926; R. Graham, Arthur Meighen, II: And Fortune Fled, Toronto, 1963, p. 437.

8. C.P. Stacey, Mackenzie King and the Atlantic Triangle, Toronto, 1976, p. 21.

9. G.N. Hillmer, 'Anglo-Canadian Relations 1926-37: A Study of Canada's Role in the Shaping of Commonwealth Policies', Ph.D, Cambridge, 1975, p. 14.

10. R. Veatch, Canada and the League of Nations, Toronto, 1975, pp. 14-15.

11. Hillmer, 'Anglo-Canadian Relations 1926-37: A Study of Canada's Role in the Shaping of Commonwealth Policies', p. 14.

12. NAC, King Papers, C2251, pp. 70955-59, Borden to King, 30 January 1923.

13. Stephen Roskill, Hankey: Man of Secrets, vol. II, 1919-1931, London, 1972, pp. 231-32, taken from CAB 63/31, Hankey to Lloyd George, 25 June and 12 July, 1921.

14. Roskill, Hankey, vol. II, pp. 276-277.

15. Stephen Roskill, Hankey: Man of Secrets, vol. I, 1877-1918, London, 1970, p. 17.

16. Roskill, Hankey, vol. II, p. 311.

17. Ibid., p. 311, taken from the Times, 27 October 1922.

18. Hankey Papers, HNKY 8/24, memorandum entitled 'The Status of the Secretariat of the Cabinet and Committee of Imperial Defence', 7 November 1922.

19. Hankey Papers, HNKY 4/11, Hankey to Lord Esher, 10 February 1919; Hankey to Smuts, 18 December 1919. HNKY 8/22, Hankey to Lloyd George, 17 November 1921. HNKY 8/24, memorandum on future of Cabinet Office with respect to the Dominion aspect, unsigned, but dated 11 July 1919.

20. PRO, FO 371/8489, A66/66/45, minute by Maurice Peterson, 3 January 1924, about correspondence of Sir Auckland Geddes, Washington to Eyre Crowe, Acting Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 21 December 1923.

21. PRO, FO 371/8489, A424/66/45, A. Geddes to Foreign Office, 22 January 1923.

22. Ibid., minute by M. Peterson, 23 January 1923.

23. PRO, FO 371/8489, A568/66/45, C.T. Davis, Colonial Office to Crowe, Foreign Office, 30 January 1923. Davis forwarded the telegram of Byng to Devonshire, 16 January 1923.

24. Ibid., minute by G. Mounsey, 31 January 1923.

25. PRO, FO 371/8490, A976/66/45, minute by R.S. Sperling, 20 February 1923.

26. Ibid., minute by G. Mounsey, 20 February 1923.

27. Ibid., R. S. Sperling, Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 22 February 1923.

28. PRO, FO 371/8489, A688/66/45, H.W. Malkin, Foreign Office to Sir Henry Lambert, Colonial Office, 3 August 1921. Copy of letter sent by C.T. Davis, Colonial Office to R.S. Sperling, Foreign Office 30 January 1923.

29. PRO, FO 371/8490, A774/66/45, minute by R.S. Sperling, 9 February 1923.

30. Ibid., Foreign Office to A. Geddes, Washington, 10 February 1923.

31. PRO, FO 371/8490, A975/66/45, E.J. Harding, Colonial Office to R.S. Sperling, Foreign Office, 16 February 1923.

32. PRO, FO 371/8490, A1081/66/45, minute by M. Peterson, 23 February 1923.

33. Ibid., minute by H. Ritchie, 27 February 1923.

34. PRO, FO 371/8490, A1364/66/45, C.T. Davis, Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 1 March 1923.

35. DCER, 3, document 627, Byng to Devonshire, 28 February, 1923.

36. PRO, FO 371/8490, A1249/66/45, Foreign Office to A. Geddes, 1 March 1923.

37. PRO, FO 371/8490, A1289/66/45, A. Geddes to Foreign Office, 2 March 1923.

38. PRO, FO 371/8490, A1249/66/45, Foreign Office to Geddes, 1 March 1923.

39. PRO, FO 371/8490, A1289/66/45, minute by R.S. Sperling, 6 March 1923.

40. Ibid., minute by G. Mounsey, 6 March 1923.

41. Ibid., minute by W. Tyrrell, 6 March 1923.

42. Ibid., minute by E.A. Crowe, 6 March 1923.

43. PRO, FO 371/8490, A2974/66/45, minute by M. Peterson, 22 May 1923.

44. PRO, FO 371/8490, A1609/66/45, C.T. Davis, Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 16 March 1923, forwarded the request made by Byng to Devonshire, 14 March 1924, PRO, CO 42/13305.

45. PRO, CO 42/25173, Byng to Devonshire, 20 March 1923. Byng also enclosed King's letter to Byng's private secretary, A.F. Sladen, 17 March 1923.

46. PRO, FO 371/8490, A1632/66/45, A. Geddes to Foreign Office, 18 March 1923.

47. Ibid., minute by R.S. Sperling, 19 March 1923.

48. Ibid., minute by W. Tyrrell, 19 March 1923.

49. PRO, FO 371/8490, A2998/66/45, minute by M. Peterson, 24 May 1923.

50. Ibid., minute by R.S. Sperling, 24 March 1923.

51. Ibid., R.G. Vansittart, Foreign Office to G. Marsh, Colonial Office, 26 May 1923.

52. PRO, FO 371/8490, A3188/66/45, G. Marsh, Colonial Office to R.G. Vansittart, Foreign Office, 28 May 1923.

53. Ibid., R.G. Vansittart, Foreign Office to Marsh, Colonial Office, 31 May 1923.

54. PRO, FO 371/8491, A4028/66/45, minute by R.S. Sperling, 6 July 1923. Sperling wrote that what the British Government was being 'asked to do is help the Canadian Government get out of the difficulty which it created for itself...'.

55. NAC, King Diaries, 10 April 1923.

56. NAC, King Papers, C2259, ff. 80291-97, M. King to Clifford Sifton, 17 August 1923.

57. NAC, King Papers, C2259, ff. 80366-7, O.D. Skelton to M. King 19 July 1923; King Diaries, 11 September 1923.

58. PRO, FO 371/8490, A1856/66/45, minute by G. Mounsey, 5 April 1923.

59. Ibid., minute by G. Mounsey, 5 April 1923.

60. Ibid., 'A Memorandum respecting Treaties as affecting Dominions', by Sir Cecil Hurst, 26 March 1923.

61. Ibid., memorandum by C. Hurst, 26 March 1923.

62. PRO, FO 372/2015, T8496/3128/350, minute by H. Malkin, 13 August 1923.

63. Ibid., minute by H. Malkin, 9 August 1923.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. PRO, FO 372/2015, T9714/3128/350, 'Treaty Signing Powers of the Dominions', a memorandum prepared in the Colonial Office, 11 September 1923.

67. Ibid., minute by G. Mounsey, 15 September 1923.

68. PRO, FO 372/2015, T10833/3128/350, minute by C. Hurst, 8 October 1923.

69. Ibid.

70. PRO, FO 371/8490, A1856/66/45, 'Memorandum respecting Treaties affecting Dominions' by C. Hurst, 26 March 1923.

71. PRO, FO 372/2015, T10833/3128/350, minute by C. Hurst, 8 October 1923.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

74. Denis Judd, The Evolution of the Modern Empire, London, 1982, p. 66; C.P. Stacey, Mackenzie King and the Atlantic Triangle, Toronto, 1976.

75. Hankey Papers, Diaries, HNKY 1/7, 11 November 1923.

76. Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, p. 193; Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 2, p. 70.

77. PRO, FO 372/2015, T11587/3098/350, minute by G. Mounsey, 7 November 1923.

78. PRO, FO 371/9412, A7756/7756/45, memorandum by E. Crowe, 1 October 1923.

CHAPTER 5

BRITAIN'S FIRST LABOUR GOVERNMENT AND ANGLO-CANADIAN RELATIONS

Studies about Anglo-Canadian relations in the 1920s have devoted little analysis to the impact created by the first Labour Government, which took office in January 1924 under Ramsay MacDonald. This lack of analysis stems from the conclusion that MacDonald's first ministry was not outstanding in policy produced.¹ Certainly in terms of domestic policy, the Labour Government did little to distinguish itself. The Labour Government showed that Labour in power was not a national disaster. In their brief nine months in power, however, Labour did make a favourable impression on foreign affairs. MacDonald took a strong interest in foreign affairs and his interest ushered in another era of Anglo-Canadian relations in the realm of foreign policy.

The lack of historical attention to MacDonald's ministry and Anglo-Canadian relations means even such straightforward questions as whether this Labour Government introduced a new approach or was content to carry on in the same vein, has gone largely unexplored. This has left an impression that in terms of imperial relations a status quo was adopted by all parties. This impression will be tested by examining the ratification of the Lausanne treaty and the British Government's attempts to convene the constitutional conference, promised in 1917 but never held. Both of these issues brought MacDonald into conflict with Mackenzie King and revealed MacDonald's imperial attitudes in foreign affairs. These encounters further helped King to shape and articulate his definition of Canada's

relationship with Britain in external affairs. When his efforts to improve consultation with Canada and other Dominions were rebuffed by King, MacDonald introduced new elements in the development of Anglo-Canadian relations.

Ramsay MacDonald

In many ways the rise of Ramsay MacDonald paralleled that of his party as both seemed highly unlikely candidates to win office. The illegitimate son of a farm labourer and a servant girl, MacDonald grew up in poverty and received only basic schooling. His rise to the leadership of a national party and then to Prime Minister of Britain was therefore remarkable, although it was hardly effortless. After two unsuccessful bids to win a seat in the House of Commons, MacDonald finally won a seat in 1906 in Leicester and held it until his defeat in 1918. Subsequent bids to re-enter the House failed until 1922, the year he assumed the leadership of the Labour party.

Apart from his own lack of experience, the burden MacDonald faced in forming the government was a shortage of ministerial material within his caucus. It was primarily for this reason that MacDonald took the unusual step of assuming the roles both of Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. In the Foreign Office, MacDonald's nine months of service were consumed with the ratification of the Lausanne Treaty, attempts to convene an imperial constitutional conference, and setting the basis for an eventual settlement of the reparations crisis which had led to French occupation of the Ruhr. The first two matters brought MacDonald into the vortex of British-Dominion relations. The ensuing conflicts generated more tension within the Anglo-Canadian relationship,

as the apparent message from London to Ottawa, intentional or not, was that the centralising forces were still strong in Whitehall. This impression immediately caused Mackenzie King to resume his vigilance over Canadian autonomy.

MacDonald Ministry:

MacDonald's ministry and Ramsay MacDonald himself received favourable assessments from both sides of the Atlantic. Mackenzie King wrote enthusiastically of the new Labour Government: 'It is a strong sane and sober administration and on the whole better I believe than any since the days of Asquith's'² Even three months into its mandate, the ever-critical Maurice Hankey observed: 'I have never worked with a more business-like Cabinet.' While the bulk of his praise was directed towards MacDonald, he could find no reason to regard the new cabinet as less competent than previous Cabinets. 'There are no very outstanding figures', noted Hankey, 'but they are quite a competent lot of men and their team work is excellent...they are no more ignorant than the members of an ordinary Party Government coming into office after a long term of absence. In fact, they were better informed.'³ Generous though Hankey was in his approval of MacDonald, believing that he had the potential to be either an admirable Prime Minister or an admirable Foreign Secretary, he feared that the Labour leader would be neither since he had taken on two demanding posts, both of which required his undivided attention to be done properly.⁴

Concerns that MacDonald had over-burdened himself reached the highest circles of government. Many, including the King, George V, and Lord Curzon, the last Foreign Secretary, voiced

concern that MacDonald would not survive the strain if he assumed both posts.⁵ Indeed, MacDonald would have preferred to turn the task of Foreign Secretary over to someone else, but he was unable to find anyone suited to the task. It is questionable how far MacDonald searched among his colleagues for a Foreign Secretary. Apart from J.H. Thomas, he apparently had little regard for his colleagues' potential skills in foreign affairs. He did seriously contemplate appointing Thomas, but hostility within Labour ranks prevented this. Thomas was not excluded, however, from the Cabinet but was appointed Colonial Secretary.⁶ While the appointment may have appeased the Labour ranks, the Colonial Office acquired a Secretary of State whose tenure was ineffectual and uneventful.

J.H. Thomas: the forgotten Colonial Secretary

If Andrew Bonar Law can claim the title as the 'Unknown Prime Minister', then certainly the J.H. Thomas can boast the title as the forgotten Colonial Secretary. His appointment was unusual in that there was little in his background or his interests which particularly qualified him for that task. His rise from errand boy, with rudimentary formal education, to trade union official, member of Parliament and then Cabinet Minister was a testament to his capabilities. He certainly proved his administrative skills by his direction of the National Union of Railwaymen, which brought him both prominence and powerful enemies, including many in the Labour Party. His placement in the Colonial Office was not because of expertise, but because it was the safest location for one of the most controversial ministers in the new government.

It would be unjust to dismiss Thomas as an ineffective Colonial Secretary because of his prior preoccupation with British labour matters. He certainly possessed skill and potential. Thomas was 'the only colleague who enjoyed unimpeded access to [MacDonald] at any time and at any length,'⁷ and this relationship might have been advantageous in giving the Colonial Office a powerful ally. Thomas also enjoyed equally good, although limited, relations, with Mackenzie King.⁸ Thomas' relationship with MacDonald and King did not make him or help him develop as a Colonial Secretary. Instead Thomas was an ardent imperialist who introduced himself to his staff at the Colonial Office with the greeting, 'I'm here to see that there is no mucking about with the British Empire'. He was content to leave the running of the Colonial Office in the hands of his officials. The result of this was that in the ensuing entanglements in dominion relations the Colonial Secretary played no role, allowing the leadership and direction to come predominantly from the Foreign Office.

Lausanne Treaty: Conflict over the Ratification

At first it was thought that British-Dominion relations would take an enlightened turn under the leadership of Ramsay MacDonald. Unlike his predecessors in the Foreign Office, he appeared conscious of the partnership between Britain and the Dominions and anxious to solicit their views. In 1923 he actively canvassed the opinions of Canadian members of Parliament on foreign affairs.¹⁰ The illusions of improved relations, however, were shattered by complications which arose over the ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne in the

early months of 1924.

MacDonald inherited the problematic Treaty of Lausanne which originated with the Chanak Crisis of 1922. From the beginning, the question of Canada's participation in and obligations to the treaty had been vague. The task fell to MacDonald to proceed with the final stages of ratification, and this brought him into conflict with the Canadian Prime Minister. Decades of hindsight suggest that the dissension between MacDonald and King is a footnote in the annals of imperial relations. Even among those writers¹¹ who pay heed to the dispute, the matter is regarded, in the Canadian context, as another event which entrenched King's desire to remove Canada from any obligations to British foreign policy. C.P. Stacey carried the argument one step further and cited it as another example that showed 'London's attitude to Dominion problems was careless and casual.'¹² It is true that King's determination not to have Canada as a partner in the treaty, and his success this way, did strengthen his resolve to have sole command in determining Canada's international commitments. It is unfair, however, to dismiss the actions of MacDonald as casual. Quite the contrary in fact. The débâcle over ratification awakened an interest in MacDonald about the role of Dominions in foreign affairs, since beyond the actual issue of the Treaty of Lausanne was the more general question of imperial unity in matters of political treaties. It was events in the final stages of the Lausanne treaty that spurred MacDonald to search for a new consensus with the Dominions.

As the conflict in the Chanak came to a close, the main task became the drafting of a new peace with Turkey to replace the Treaty of Sèvres. Contrary to the practice established in

Paris Peace talks of 1919 and the Washington Conference of 1921, the Dominions were not invited to send representatives. Lord Curzon, then Foreign Secretary, had been unable to plead successfully to Poincaré, the French representative. Poincaré refused to allow the Dominions to be represented unless the French protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia were also given representation.¹³ Curzon tried to argue that the precedent of Dominion representation, inapplicable to the two French protectorates, had been established in Versailles¹⁴, but Poincaré refused to give way.

King was not offended by Canada's exclusion from the peace conference, but rather regarded it as advancing his cause of securing Canadian autonomy in the matter of international commitments. To the Canadian Prime Minister, it was logical that since Canada had not been involved in the military conflict, it should not be involved in the settlement. King's unwillingness to fight for Canadian representation was compatible with his evolving argument that the Canadian Parliament had to ratify any treaty before Canada could be held responsible for its maintenance. Any recommendation concerning ratification had to come from the Canadian cabinet which could responsibly make the recommendation only if Canada was an actual participant in the treaty's drafting. Thus King was freed of obligation under the Treaty of Lausanne because Canada was excluded from the negotiations. It was in King's interest not to press for representation. Without representation he had the ideal excuse for avoiding ratification, or, more meaningfully, of escaping commitment, thus strengthening Canada's independence in foreign matters. This Canadian line of argument, emerging

in the early stages of the Lausanne conference, never changed. Difficulties arose because the British interpretation of Canada's commitments was rooted in the belief that Canada would ratify the treaty and thus maintain imperial unity.

British misunderstandings on this point of ratification arose because of King's communications. In the autumn of 1922, King personally wrote the Canadian response to the first British telegram informing Devonshire, then Colonial Secretary, that there would be no Dominion representation at the conference. As was typical of King, it was a rambling response full of ambiguous and vague statements about Canada's commitment to ratification.¹⁵ King believed that he had explained that absence from the negotiations meant that Canada accepted exclusion from the entire process, including any responsibilities involved under the treaty.¹⁶ Unfortunately, Whitehall's interpretation differed greatly. It assumed that the Canadian Government took no offence at the composition of the British delegation and was prepared to present the impending treaty to its Parliament for ratification. Devonshire cabled this interpretation of the arrangements to King in early December 1922.¹⁷

King, once again, took it upon himself to argue his case. This time he drew upon the examples of the conferences at Versailles and Washington. He identified the four stages which were established at these conferences as prerequisites before Canada committed itself to the ensuing treaties. First, Canada appointed a representative who participated in the negotiations and the drafting of the treaty. Second, this representative formally signed the treaty on behalf of the Canadian Government. Third, approval of the treaty was given

by the Canadian Parliament, and finally, the Canadian Government recommended that the treaty be ratified by the King. The underlying factor throughout this process was that Canada had a direct interest in each of the treaties concerned and therefore chose to be committed to them. Correspondingly, by not having representatives at the negotiations of the treaty Canada was completely excluded from the process, including the ratification of the treaty.¹⁸

Again, King's telegram was imprecise in meaning. He did not state outright that Canada would not ratify the treaty. King's vagueness would have prolonged misunderstanding between Britain and Canada over ratification had not Byng sent a private accompanying note which concisely stated the Canadian position: 'I understand Prime Minister is afraid that representative of Canada may be asked to sign Treaty and does not want to be put in position of refusing request. He holds that as Canada is not represented at Conference Canada cannot sign Treaty.' Byng added the further note, 'He is quite agreeable that Lord Curzon should sign for Empire and that Treaty should be presented to Canadian Parliament for ratification in usual way.'¹⁹ A great deal has been made of this final sentence and Byng has been blamed for causing misunderstanding regarding ratification.²⁰ Byng's added statement may have given substance to the British expectations that Canada would ratify the treaty, but it was not the sole source of these expectations. For the moment, King took the matter as settled when Devonshire replied that the British Government accepted the fact that Canada would not sign the treaty. The Colonial Secretary's telegram did not mention the issue of ratification, since this to the British, was separate

from signing. It was not, therefore, an obvious corollary that Canada's failure to sign the treaty meant that it excluded itself from the ratification process.

Much of the British misconception that Canada would ratify the treaty was based upon the fact that until Canada did so it was still technically at war with Turkey. This practical legal consideration unravelled King's otherwise tidy argument. The Lausanne Treaty replaced the Treaty of Sèvres which, despite King's interpretation of events surrounding the signing of the various Peace treaties of 1919, had been signed by a British representative on behalf of Canada and was ratified by the Canadian Parliament. Thus for two additional reasons, apart from the telegram from Byng, Whitehall concluded that Canada would ratify the treaty.

MacDonald and King:

Whitehall was not alone in contemplating the riddle that without ratification Canada was still technically at war with Turkey. In early April, O.D. Skelton, the future Canadian Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, and already a close adviser of King, wrote to the Canadian Prime Minister on this very concern. In language far more precise than King's own, Skelton encapsulated the dilemma facing the Canadian Government and offered two solutions. He acted on the assumption that Canada was technically at war with Turkey, since the collapse of the Treaty of Sèvres, and would remain so until the new treaty was ratified. Exploring Canada's options, Skelton feared the implications if Canada allowed the King to ratify on the recommendation of Britain and other Dominions, with only Canada refusing approval. To permit

this, reasoned Skelton, was an admission by Canada that its assent was not required in order to bind it to a treaty. He concluded that for Canada to allow this would be a tacit admittance, or worse still, acceptance, that the British Government still spoke for all parts of the Empire. In the end, Skelton recommended endorsing the treaty proper but excluding some of the conventions and protocols.²¹

Skelton was correct in his assessment of the Treaty of Lausanne. But whether consciously or not, he ignored a vital element in his argument: by conceding that Canada was still at war with Turkey, he inadvertently admitted that Britain could still declare and commit Canada to war. This consideration was equal in importance to ratification; until it was acknowledged and resolved, the British-Canadian relationship would remain an unequal partnership. This question was not the one dominating the Lausanne Treaty discussion, however, as attention remained fixed on ratification and Canada's role in the process. It was this issue of ratification which brought MacDonald, relatively early in his tenure as Prime Minister, into conflict with King.

On 1 April 1924, in response to a question in the House of Commons, Ramsay MacDonald made an unfortunate conjecture that Canada would ratify and accept the obligations of the Treaty of Lausanne. King was incensed when he learned of MacDonald's statement. Initially, he directed his anger at the Colonial Secretary and then at MacDonald. On both accounts he created a stir. In both instances, the misunderstanding regarding Canada's position stemmed from a false interpretation of Canada's earlier statements on her position.

King wrote his first rebuttal of MacDonald's comments to J.H. Thomas, the Colonial Secretary. Including copies of the dispatches sent from Canada on the matter since the autumn of 1922, King argued, as the dispatches showed, from the beginning, that since Canada was not a party to the negotiations it would not accept any obligations resulting from the treaty. This forceful declaration by King²² resulted in a lengthy memorandum prepared by the Colonial Office staff to provide background information for Thomas. Historically, it is a valuable chronology tracing the Colonial Office's understanding of evolving relations with Canada. The memorandum traced the dispatches exchanged with Canada and showed that as lucid as King believed he had been in defining the Canada's stance, he had in fact so confused the Colonial Office that officials were shocked by what they regarded as a King's change in position over Canada's treaty obligation. While the memorandum deals with the specifics of this issue, it also reveals how startled the Colonial Office staff were by Canada's apparent desire to breach imperial unity.

The Colonial Office memorandum focused on Canada's obligations to the Treaty of Sèvres, the predecessor of the Treaty of Lausanne, which dated from the Paris Peace Conference. The Dominions had accepted obligations even though they had not participated in negotiations and were committed by a British representative's signature. It was not, therefore, unreasonable to assume that these conditions would continue to be acceptable. Furthermore, the memorandum noted that Canada had not refuted these assumptions when they were communicated in December 1922.²³

Tracing the contents of the telegrams exchanged, the

memorandum stressed that Canada never clearly indicated an unwillingness to ratify the Lausanne Treaty. Citing the Canadian telegram of 25 November 1922²⁴, which queried obligations under new treaty, the Colonial Office argued it had made it 'perfectly plain that any Treaty negotiated would, as a Treaty of Peace, be binding on Canada...' ²⁵ in its reply of 8 December 1922.²⁶ It believed Canada accepted this conclusion as the telegram of 31 December 1922²⁷ 'did not in any way challenge this view.'²⁸ Disturbed by King's comment that following the precedent of Versailles and Washington, since Canada had not participated in the negotiations, it would not be sending a representative, the Colonial Office nevertheless believed that Canada would ratify the treaty. This assumption had been confirmed by a private note from Lord Byng²⁹ accompanying the telegram.

The last substantial correspondence on the matter came in June 1923, when the Colonial Office informed Canada that only a British representative would be signing.³⁰ Canada responded that it approved of this arrangement.³¹ It was, therefore, a shock when the forceful telegram of 24 March 1924 arrived disassociating Canada completely from ratification of the treaty. The Colonial Office was at a loss to explain the change.³² On reflection, it realised that Canada's position had been ambiguous from the beginning and, worse still, it could not be said 'that there is anything on record to show that the Canadian Government have accepted the obligations imposed by the Treaty.'³³ Even with the memorandum prepared by his officials to guide him, the Colonial Secretary took no lead in the matter. King was not to be silenced without satisfaction. He turned to MacDonald and accused him of

deliberately misrepresenting the position of the Canadian Government. What followed was a fascinating unofficial correspondence between the two Prime Ministers.

Initially, MacDonald tried to pass the question off as the action of a few political agitators. He wrote to King of his belief that many were well informed of the difficulties between the British and Canadian Governments over the treaty, but a few had decided to try to make political gain from it. In particular, he accused a 'mischievous little group of Liberals [British]' who seemed to be 'doing their level best to do evil in order to satisfy their hatred' of the Labour Government. In his response MacDonald wrote that he thought that Canada would fulfil all necessary obligations, conceding it was 'a purely personal belief' not based on a written promise, but rather based on his feelings about what Canada might do. He acknowledged that 'in the heat of debate it may have been rather peremptorily expressed.'³⁴

As usual, King replied in a long, convoluted letter which extended to six typed pages. On the theoretical level, King initially made sense as he argued that the precedents of the Versailles and Washington conferences meant that, in order for the Dominions to be committed to obligations, they must have representation or at least full knowledge and have given their prior consent. To reject this precedent would mean a return to the state of what King referred to, in one of his favourite phrases, as 'secret diplomacy' whereby the Dominions were committed without consultation or approval from their respected parliaments.³⁵

On the technicality that Canadians were still at war until the treaty was ratified either by or for them, King's

thinking becomes hard to follow. His solution was that the state of war should end as it began 'by the separate and unassisted action of His Majesty's Government.' He continued with a confusing riddle concerning his views on ratification. Alternatively, he explained that 'in no way did I suggest that any part of the Empire should be excluded from ratification.' He followed with the explanation that 'I simply made it plain that not having participated at the Conference, not having been represented at the Conference, not having signed the treaty or authorized its signature, we did not feel that we could recommend the treaty to Parliament for approval and that without Parliament's approval, as government we could not concur in its ratification.' King concluded that by not ratifying the treaty in the Canadian Parliament, he was asserting the new imperial relationship whereby Britain could no longer impose obligations on self-governing Dominions, in this instance 'under the guise of ending a state of war.'³⁶

On a personal level, MacDonald's actions cast a shadow over his working relationship with King. In the closing section of his letter, King displayed annoyance over the comments in Parliament and observed that MacDonald had to correct them publicly. 'I deeply appreciate', wrote King, 'what you have said confidentially,...but you can see that this does not help me in the least with respect to the false position in which I have been placed, when no word is forthcoming publicly from you.' He stressed the need for a public retraction from MacDonald, or else he would have to resort to laying a complete explanation before the Canadian Parliament.³⁷

MacDonald neither responded on the point of a public

clarification, nor explored the inconsistency in King's argument that he would allow the King to ratify without excluding any part of the Empire. He adopted the interpretation that Canada accepted the British ratification, but regarded itself as excluded. It was this understanding which caused MacDonald to focus on resolving the issue that Canada was still technically at war. He wrote to King that with all the Dominions, except Canada, agreeing to ratification, there remained unanswered questions, such as Canada's position under international law, or indeed the position of the British Empire? MacDonald pleaded with King to work with him in resolving the matter and offered the suggestion that Canada might not be compromised if King accepted it as an obligation under the League of Nations or if he treated 'the experience as a special one and safeguard yourself against a repetition of it by a declaration to that effect'.³⁸ In the end, King chose not to seek out a mutual solution with MacDonald and embraced, in what was becoming a familiar pattern, action through inaction.

No further crises surrounding the Treaty of Lausanne materialised. In many ways this episode has been relegated to secondary status in the Anglo-Canadian relationship in this period.³⁹ While the long-term effects of the crisis are generally minor, it offers a point for reflecting upon the development of British-Canadian relations, after the Imperial Conference 1923, both in theory and in practice. One surprising feature comes from King's lack of clarity in explaining the status of Canada in imperial matters. The question begged is whether this was merely due to King's inability to express his thoughts, or whether he was still

confused over the precise nature of Canada's imperial relationship and his understanding of it. The answer is not straightforward. Certainly, King's imprecision with his written word caused confusion. But equally, King appeared unsure as to how to resolve the riddle that Canada did require association, either directly or indirectly, with ratification of the treaty of Lausanne. Skelton made it clear to King that to accept ratification indirectly, by permitting the King's ratification to be applicable to all of the Empire, would be supporting the continuing concept that the British Government's advice to the King in foreign affairs would be applicable to all parts of the Empire. Consequently, King choose to permit Canada's indirect association with the ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne. King's decision sustained the message to the outside world that the British Empire still spoke with one voice in foreign affairs. His action also bolstered the image that the British Government was still the spokesman for the Empire.

Within the spectrum of imperial relations, the conflict with King awakened in the British Prime Minister a new awareness concerning imperial relations, and in particular those with Canada and the breakdown in communication which arose from a lack of consultation. In order to prevent another such conflict, improving consultation with the Dominions became a priority for MacDonald in the aftermath of the Lausanne question. Undeterred by King's refusal to work towards resolving the problem of the Treaty of Lausanne, the British Prime Minister sought better consultation and communication by resurrecting the proposal for a constitutional conference. Unfortunately, King proved as

unwilling in this spirit of cooperation as he had in the spirit of cooperation to resolve the conflict over Treaty of Lausanne.

Constitutional Conference: Failed efforts 1919-24

MacDonald's desire to convene a constitutional conference was not a novel idea but rather the last attempt to call the conference referred to in Resolution IX of the Imperial Conference of 1917. The significance of Resolution IX is now symbolic, but when it was drafted, however, the draftees anticipated action, particularly with its commitment to a constitutional conference to discuss imperial relations as soon as possible after the war. The circumstances which prevented its being summoned form an important aspect in understanding the evolution of British-Canadian relations. When MacDonald attempted to implement the proposal in 1924, his action was doomed because the atmosphere of imperial relations had changed too much. But even in the more favourable post-war environment, the will did not exist either in Whitehall or in the Dominions to bring it about.

Within Whitehall, efforts to mount a constitutional conference went through two great periods of activity. The first phase, during the years 1919-1921, was more energetic than the second, during the summer and autumn of 1924. When contrasted, the two periods present an interesting insight into the progression of thinking on both sides of the Atlantic.

One difference in Whitehall's attitude, between these two periods, was the belief in 1919-1921 that this conference would actually take place. In these years, debate within the

Colonial Office revolved around specifics such as the agenda and its contents. This in turn raised the question of timing in order to allow for adequate preparation. In the end the debate became circular: the preparation time required pushed the date further and further off, until it had been postponed so long that what remained of any enthusiasm for a conference had dissipated by early 1922.

This inability to set a date was due also to an unwillingness both in the Dominions and Britain to participate. The reluctance of the Dominions, such as Canada, has received a great deal of attention, and has been interpreted in two ways: either as an example of increasing Dominion nationalism, or as an indication of changing attitudes within the Dominions to the new international order. After the Great War, the Dominions no longer regarded the British Empire as the sole means to achieving peace, but rather, decided that a partnership was required between the United States and the British Empire, and this shifted their attention away from imperial integration.⁴⁰

Perhaps growing nationalism and a new definition of the British Empire in the international arena influenced Dominion leaders, but Canadian politicians had more practical reasons. As Robert Borden, the Canadian Prime Minister until 1920, wrote: 'We were over-confident in proposing a Constitutional Convention immediately after the war, as no such Convention could be summoned to advantage until after the subject had been considered and debated much more exhaustively than has hitherto been practicable.'⁴¹ His successor, Arthur Meighen, opposed an early convening of a constitutional conference, not because of nationalistic impulses, but because he failed to

grasp what had to be changed. Long before the First World War, Canada was conscious that its best interests were served not within the imperial context alone, but within the triangle formed by itself, the United States and Britain.

Whatever the reason, Canadian leaders were not anxious to become involved in a constitutional conference immediately after the war. They would have been surprised to learn that even before Meighen said in the autumn of 1920 that he would not participate in such a conference in 1921, Whitehall had already postponed the conference for an undetermined future date. In these years, virtually all the decisions on the British side regarding a constitutional conference were made within the Colonial Office, and almost exclusively between the Colonial Secretary, Lord Milner, and his Parliamentary Under-Secretary, L.S. Amery.

In the first summer of peace, the problems which blocked a constitutional gathering were beginning to appear. In July 1919, Maurice Hankey, the Secretary of the Cabinet, held out little hope that the constitutional conference would be imminent, as the Dominion leaders had to return to pressing domestic matters, and therefore any imperial developments must await their next visit to Britain.⁴² The question became a matter of trying to coordinate schedules to find the first appropriate time. The initiative came not from the Canadians but from the British and chiefly from L.S. Amery.

Amery approached the organisation of the conference with his usual enthusiasm, only to encounter opposition from an unexpected source, his superior, Lord Milner. The opposition of Milner was surprising since as early as 1916 he stated on public record his belief that a 'great and deliberate effort

of constitutional reconstruction,⁴³ was required. Immediately after the war, he reiterated the hope that within the year a constitutional conference would be held since, 'with the one great exception of the Crown, a bond of priceless value, it [the Commonwealth] has no common organ of any kind. The old bonds of Empire are obsolete and no new constitutional bonds have been created.'⁴⁴ In 1919 Milner appeared publicly still committed to a constitutional restructuring. In practice, however, he gave no support to Amery's efforts.

In December, 1919, Milner informed Amery he too understood the urgency because of the 'present chaos' in imperial relations, but he decided that since the Dominion leaders were exhausted, the conference should be postponed unless they pressed for it.⁴⁵ Through January, 1920, Amery renewed his efforts and expressed to Milner his concern about the dangers of delay. 'What I cannot help feeling', wrote Amery, 'is that while the Constitutional Conference may be postponed till next year all sorts of things are bound to happen this year which may make the situation increasingly difficult for the Conference unless something in the nature of an Imperial Conference keeps things together.'⁴⁶ Milner again expressed his support in principle for Amery's efforts but fearing a backlash refused to permit any planning for a conference. He believed such initiatives would be 'in for a bad re-action [sic] in constructive Imperial politics, but if we can weather the next year or two without letting everything that was achieved during the war go absolutely to pieces it should be possible to rebuild on the foundations then laid.'⁴⁷ It is questionable how candid Milner was to Amery in revealing all his motives for blocking the conference. Anxious about

the direction such a gathering might take, the Colonial Secretary wished to avoid the risk. In the autumn of 1920 it was this apprehension, not those relating to the attitudes of Dominion leaders, that guided Milner.

In the autumn of 1920, W.M. Hughes, Prime Minister of Australia, wrote to the British Government pressing for a constitutional conference. He wanted to check the forces which were causing the Empire to drift, as the 'Dominions now are exerting themselves in a way...that may lead us anywhere.' Hughes cited the example of the pending Canadian appointment at Washington.⁴⁸ This telegram provided Milner with the indication he had previously required that the Dominions wished to have such a conference. Now Milner chose to overlook this fact and, forwarding the telegram to Lloyd George, enclosed a 'very confidential note' to Lloyd George which argued against conceding the request on the ground that it was not worth the risk of evolving 'a new constitution'. He reasoned that avoiding a conference would force the Dominions and Britain to work within the parameters of the existing system and seek out practical solutions to ensure 'harmony'. 'It is true', noted Milner, 'that we have been drifting rather, and we and the Dominions are all at sixes and sevens about "Imperial Cabinet", "Imperial Conference", "Constitutional Conference", etc., etc. Everybody feels that something is wanted, yet nobody knows what...We do not, in my humble opinion, want a "Constitutional" or other "Conference"....'.⁴⁹ Milner did not have to press his case hard with Lloyd George, whose only commitment to redefining British-Dominion relations was to mouth empty words of support.

Milner had no difficulty, therefore, in accepting Arthur Meighen's wish that no constitutional conference be held in 1921. As Meighen informed Amery, 'I am strongly impressed with the importance of letting constitutional developments proceed as a matter of growth without pre-arrangement and as far as possible without concrete emphatic alteration. In a word, while things must grow and change for the better it would be just so much for the better if they do not appear to change at all.'⁵⁰ Meighen objected to an Imperial Conference and refused to attend one in 1921, if it was to be the promised constitutional conference. In a fashion which made him so effective in settling impasses, Milner personally penned an unofficial letter to Meighen asking him to reconsider attending an Imperial gathering in 1921 as many immediate matters needed to be settled. Milner held out the olive branch that no immediate constitutional conference would be held in the near future.⁵¹ Meighen accepted.

At the Imperial gathering of 1921, many observers in attendance also concluded that the constitutional conference was not imminent. As Loring Christie reported to Borden, 'there does not seem to be much prospect of much else being done for many people seem inclined to go slow on the constitutional question.'⁵² As events unfolded, things went much slower than even Christie predicted. Amery's last major bid to convene a constitutional conference came in June of 1921, when he suggested to Lloyd George that the now retired Milner chair a committee to set the agenda for a conference and make recommendations for the interim.⁵³ The suggestion never came to fruition and the issue lay dormant through 1922 and 1923.

The failure to call the constitutional conference in the years 1919-21 meant the loss of an imperial opportunity. At this time the attitudes of Canada and Britain, and indeed the other Dominions were sufficiently close that it would have been possible to reach a consensus, and thus extend the life of imperial unity. The conference did not occur for several reasons including preoccupation of the Dominions with domestic affairs; but the factor of Dominion nationalism is not in itself an adequate explanation. It fails to take into account prevailing attitudes in Whitehall, and notably overlooks the firm opposition of Lord Milner. In Canada, Borden, the first Prime Minister to deal with the issue, was not opposed to a constitutional conference, but wished to have time to prepare properly and to get domestic matters in hand first. His successor, Meighen, was opposed to a conference not because he regarded it as an infringement on Canada's national sovereignty, but because he was content with the current status of Canada within the Empire. The theory that Dominion nationalism blocked a conference was to develop within Canada later and it became a positive factor only in 1924 under Mackenzie King.

The question which begs an answer is whether anyone benefited from avoiding a conference in these early years. Canada's growing control of all its affairs was a strong beneficiary. Had a conference been convened and decisions made, Canada might have been brought more into the imperial network and into machinery from which it would have been more difficult in the ensuing years to disengage itself, particularly in respect of commitments regarding imperial foreign policy. If this supposition has any validity, clearly

the loser was Britain. While Milner feared how a conference might have redefined imperial relations, Amery was more shrewd in assessing the value of a conference. He intended it to avoid 'anything in the nature of a fixed or written constitution'⁵⁴ and to concentrate primarily on constructing the machinery of consultation for a new Empire.⁵⁵ In view of the future problems caused by diverging attitudes and the lack of effective consultation regarding foreign policy, it is clear that, by avoiding a constitutional conference, Whitehall missed its best chance to prolong the life of imperial unity in foreign affairs. This was not realised until several years later, at which point the next concerted action was too late.

Attempts of 1924: Constitutional Conference

Although efforts to convene a constitutional conference failed in 1919-21, in the years which followed there lingered a despair in Britain over the confusion of the role of the Dominions in the imperial foreign policy. In November 1922, on the eve of the difficulties which would arise over the Lausanne Conference and treaty, Eyre A. Crowe, the Permanent Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office, allowed his disenchantment to show. Casting his thoughts back to the negotiations of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, Crowe recalled the panel system and the participation of Dominion representatives in these panels on behalf of the British Empire. Crowe's recollections revealed his displeasure at Britain being represented by men who knew little or nothing of the countries being discussed.

It would be deplorable to repeat at Lausanne the arrangement made at the Paris

Peace Conference...[Sir Robert Borden becoming Britain's] "expert" [on Albania] was ludicrous and embarrassing...

That the position of the Dominions is thoroughly anomalous must be admitted. This is the inevitable consequence of the illogical precedent of the Paris Peace Conference. No amount of sophistication can get us over the fundamentally contradicting principles indulging the arrangements then insisted upon. We at one moment maintain the position that the British Empire, as also its foreign policy, is one; at another moment we claim a separate and entirely independent position for each Dominion in the important sphere of foreign policy represented by the League of Nations. The arrangement is difficult to defend in theory as it is difficult to work in practice.⁵⁶

This sense of frustration grew more widespread and contributed to the efforts to deal with the problem during the MacDonald ministry.

A notable difference in 1924 was that the motivation came from the Foreign Office and, more significantly, from the Prime Minister. This motivation reflected a more direct involvement by the Foreign Office and a recognition that the issue of imperial unity affected the Foreign Office the most, and that the Foreign Office could no longer run the risk of allowing the Dominions' role in foreign policy to remain exclusively under the direction of the Colonial Office. Even so, it would be unfair to suggest that the Foreign Office began to contemplate the advisability of a constitutional conference only in 1924. During 1919-1921, the Foreign Office contemplated imperial affairs more discerningly than did the Colonial Office. After repeated difficulties, the Foreign Office concluded only a formal constitutional conference would clarify the division of power between Britain and the Dominions in directing imperial foreign affairs.

One clear example of the problems the Foreign Office

faced in dealing with the changed, but undefined, state of imperial relations occurred over a draft convention regarding water pollution on the boundary between the United States and Canada in 1921. Concern arose in the Foreign Office when it learned, from reading Canadian Parliamentary comments, that the Canadians believed it fully within their rights to sign the convention alone. British officials were perturbed by this break with precedent in excluding the signature of a British delegate. Not only were senior officials upset, but they were frustrated by the obstacles facing them. Getting no support from the Colonial Office, they knew they could not prevent Canada from using the phrase 'on the advice of the Canadian Government' in the preamble. Conversely, they then could not stop other Dominions following Canada's example. The implementation of such a preamble, together with the precedent of a Dominion signing agreements alone, meant a fatal blow to imperial diplomatic unity. This confusion caused one official to cite this as a clear example of why a constitutional conference was required.⁵⁷ Another observed that the conference was needed in order to 'prevent innovations being made [in this case by Canada] before the position has been discussed and determined.'⁵⁸

The most interesting memorandum came from C.J.B. Hurst, a Legal Adviser in the Foreign Office. His reaction to Canada's attitudes and understanding of imperial relations illustrates prevailing assumptions on imperial relations. The precedent which worried him the most was the possibility that Canada could claim that the Crown acted on Canada's advice alone. These implications were far-reaching and undermined imperial unity. While Hurst acknowledged that constitutional

relations with the Dominions were developing he denied that power had been given to the Dominions to instruct the Crown alone. Hurst did not rule out that 'within the near future we shall reach a practice under which a Dominion Government would be entitled to advise HM to act in a matter affecting that Dominion, we have not reached that stage at present.' He observed that already in one sense the Dominions had arrangements where the Crown acted on their advice, as seen in the person of the Governor General. He was quick to qualify this position, however, by pointing out that the sphere of the Governor General was limited and did not include treaties. Hurst was adamant that the power of making treaties still remained exclusively with the British Government. This tenet was essential to the maintenance of imperial unity, argued Hurst, 'if some measure of central control is still to be maintained over the international engagements of the Empire and of its constituents elements - a control which seems to me essential if the unity of the Empire is to be preserved - the whole question of the conduct of the foreign relations of the Empire is bound to be brought into consideration because it is necessarily involved in any decision arrived at.'⁵⁹ Both Hurst and Amery agreed in placing weight on the indivisibility of the Crown. Again, however, this riddle hindered the clarification of imperial relations. The Monarch was one unit not multiple. If the Monarch had more than one set of advisers, did not this, concluded Hurst, invite the potential conflict of action, when the Monarch received conflicting advice?

The issue of Canada signing the Convention in 1921 did not develop further, as it did not get beyond the draft stage.

The Foreign Office saw the incident as a clear illustration of how vitally a constitutional conference was required in order to set guidelines to prevent the erosion of imperial diplomatic unity. Without guidelines there existed no way to check the Dominions' behaviour. In 1921, however, the Foreign Office, while content to recognise the need for a constitutional conference, was prepared to leave the issue to the Colonial Office.

An awareness of the need to preserve imperial unity carried over to 1924 when the Foreign Office assumed the initiative in attempting to convene a gathering of Dominion representatives to examine and define the constitutional arrangements between Britain and the Dominions. Gone in 1924, however, was the conviction that Hurst had expressed in 1921 that treaty-making powers for the Empire were held exclusively by Whitehall. As MacDonald took the lead in trying to bring the Dominions together to sort out constitutional relations, his theme was one of cooperation and consultation. Motivated by the difficulties he had encountered in ratifying the Treaty of Lausanne, MacDonald thought present problems arose not from the Dominions exerting themselves in their new relations with Britain but from the weakness in the existing structure. In this assessment, MacDonald espoused a view opposite to that of Mackenzie King and his government.

MacDonald first intimated in April 1924 that he wished to bring the Dominions together to define constitutional relations and establish a mechanism for effective consultation. After this initial statement, he did not raise the issue again until June.⁶⁰ At that time, MacDonald carefully stressed that the proposed gathering was not a

Constitutional Conference, but rather a 'special meeting' which would explore constitutional matters in a preliminary manner. This preliminary examination would be the foundation for a future Constitutional Conference.⁶¹ The request was not favourably viewed by O.D. Skelton, in Canada, who regarded it as a step towards unification and counter to what had been achieved in imperial relations. As Skelton observed of MacDonald, 'the sphere is much more limited than Mr. MacDonald recognises. Many of his present difficulties would vanish if he realised that it was his task to frame the policy, not of the British Empire, but of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.'⁶² Eventually, Skelton concluded that Canada could not refuse to participate since it appeared likely that Australia, New Zealand and the Irish Free State would participate. He concluded that since Canada had no choice but to participate, it was best to begin preparations. He was completely opposed, however, to invitations for representatives from the opposition as well as from the government.⁶³ So it was that Canada agreed to participate in a preliminary constitutional meeting whose date was set for October 1924.⁶⁴ Before it could be held, the Labour Government collapsed and the ensuing general election prevented a convening of this meeting.

The short life of this first Labour Government means that much must be left to conjecture in assessing its imperial vision. The attempt by MacDonald to convene a meeting in preparation for a constitutional conference shows that he had a keen interest in imperial affairs. He was motivated by a firm belief that if he could bring the Dominion leaders together, he could secure cooperation and salvage imperial

unity. There is no sign that his conviction ever wavered, and had his government not collapsed he likely would have persisted with the constitutional conference. From the Canadian side, however, there is little evidence to suggest that such a meeting and future conference would have produced the results MacDonald desired. Skelton, in preparation for this preliminary meeting, prepared a memorandum on Canadian policy. Skelton defined MacDonald's assumptions on foreign policy as based on the belief that 'there must be one foreign policy for the Empire, that the British Empire must be considered a unit in foreign affairs and conferences.' Skelton noted that it was 'essential to decline to accept this view of the Empire as a whole being a single and in fact the only international unit.' Canada had to reject this view of the Empire. If Canada did not, then Skelton concluded, it would be 'impossible for us [Canadians] to claim with any logic either our present distinct representation in the League of Nations or distinct representation in future international conferences.'⁶⁵

MacDonald's efforts were too late in the imperial story, yet they show the degree of optimism and misguidance which prevailed. His attempts, moreover, proved a forerunner of a shift in the thinking of Whitehall. MacDonald employed the phrase 'consultation' to describe the direction he wished imperial relations to take⁶⁶, but his guiding principle remained the maintenance of unity in foreign affairs. Unity still seemed possible once the correct machinery of consultation could be found. He believed that effective cooperation and consultation with the Dominions in foreign affairs would produce acceptance by them of any

responsibilities incurred by treaties and thus unity would be maintained. In 1924, the shift in policy centred on the recognition by Whitehall that the Dominions' consent was required before they were bound to any treaty obligations, but centralising tendencies persisted as the British officials continued to believe that it was merely a question of devising the appropriate machinery of consultation to preserve unity. The difficulty rested with Canada's determination not to be drawn into the web of consultation. Over the next several years, Canada systematically closed every avenue which might have permitted increased consultation and preserved unity.

1. Middlemas and Barnes, Baldwin, pp. 270-278; D. Dutton, Austen Chamberlain: Gentleman in Politics, Bolton, 1985, pp. 220-221; H. Nicholson, George V, London, 1952, reprinted, 1979, pp. 382-403.
2. NAC, King Diaries, 22 January 1924.
3. Hankey Papers, HNKY 4/16, Hankey to Smuts, 1 August 1924.
4. Hankey Papers, HNKY 4/16, Hankey to J. Smuts, 1 April 1924.
5. Kenneth Rose, King George V, London, 1983, p. 330, taken from Curzon to Grace Curzon, 6 January 1924, Curzon Papers, private collection at Kedleston.
6. Rose, King George V, p. 326.
7. Thomas Jones, Of Prime Ministers and Cabinets, address: Welsh National Lecture, BBC, 6 October 1938, p. 10.
8. NAC, King Papers, C2260. There exist in the King Papers several letters between King and Thomas prior to the latter's appointment as Colonial Secretary. At one point, King consulted Thomas on the appointing of a president for Canadian National Railway. The correspondence was reciprocated by Thomas who in 1923 wrote an extensive letter to King on the state of British domestic politics. The two men appear not to have progressed, though, past a formal letter in address to each other.
9. Rose, King George V, p. 329, taken from a letter from Lord Haldane to his wife, 28 February 1924, Haldane Papers 6007, National Library of Scotland.

10. NAC, King Papers, C2256, ff. 76150-55, D.A. MacKinnon to M. King, 10 July 1923. MacKinnon, a member of the Canadian Parliament, forwarded to King a copy of his response to the R. MacDonald's request of Canadian politicians opinions on foreign affairs.

11. H.B. Neatby, William Lyon Mackenzie King, vol. 2, Toronto, 1963, pp. 33-34; Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 2, pp. 43-44.

12. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. II:1921-1948, p. 44.

13. PRO, FO 371/7905, E11358/27/44, M. Poincaré to Curzon, 19 October 1922.

14. Ibid., Curzon to Poincaré, 20 October 1922.

15. PRO, CO 532/274/16674, Byng to Devonshire, 13 October 1922.

16. NAC, King Diaries, 28-29 October 1922.

17. PRO, CO 532/274/16674, Devonshire to Byng, 8 December 1922.

18. PRO, CO 532/274/16674, Byng to Devonshire, 31 December 1922.

19. PRO, CO 532/274/16674, Byng to Devonshire, 31 December 1922. See also, Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 2, p. 39.

20. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 2, p. 39.

21. NAC, King Papers, C2272, ff. 92955-57, O.D. Skelton to M. King, 8 April 1924.

22. PRO, CO 532/274/16674, Byng to Thomas, 4 April 1924.

23. PRO, CO 532/235/16674, 'Notes on Canadian Cable, prepared by Colonial Office for J.H. Thomas', undated.

24. PRO, CO 532/274/16674, Byng to Devonshire, 25 November 1922.

25. PRO, CO 532/235/16674, 'Notes on Canadian Cable, prepared by Colonial Office for J.H. Thomas', undated, Devonshire to Byng, 8 December 1922.

26. PRO, CO 532/274/16674, Devonshire to Byng, 8 December 1922.

27. PRO, CO 532/274/16674, Byng to Devonshire, 31 December 1922.

19. PRO, CO 532/235/16674, 'Notes on Canadian Cable, prepared by Colonial Office for J.H. Thomas', undated.

29. PRO, CO 532/274/16674, Byng to Devonshire, 31 December 1922.

30. PRO, CO 532/274/16674, Devonshire to Byng, 7 June 1923.

31. PRO, CO 532/274/16674, Byng to Devonshire, 15 June 1923.

32. PRO, CO 532/235/16674, 'Notes on Canadian Cable, prepared by Colonial Office for J.H. Thomas', undated.

33. PRO, CO 532/235/16674, 'Notes on Canadian Cable, prepared by Colonial Office for J.H. Thomas', undated.

34. NAC, King Papers, C2267, ff. 88363-4, R. MacDonald to M. King, 11 April 1924.

35. NAC, King Papers, C2267, ff. 88365-70, M. King to R. MacDonald, 23 April 1924.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. NAC, King Papers, C2267, ff. 88371-74, R. MacDonald to M. King, 5 May 1924.

39. Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, p. 215; Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience, pp. 221-223; Neatby, William Lyon Mackenzie King, vol. 2, p. 38.

40. A. Burt, The British Empire and the Commonwealth, Boston, 1956, p. 731; H. Wilson, Imperial Policy of Sir Robert Borden, Florida, 1966, p. 47.

41. R.L. Borden, Canada in the Commonwealth, Oxford, 1929, p. 92.

42. Hankey Papers, HNKY 8/24, a memorandum dated 11 July 1919. Although unsigned it appears to have been prepared by Hankey.

43. Milner Papers, 464, f. 5, address given by Milner to a conference gathering of representatives from British and Dominion Parliaments.

44. Alfred Milner, The British Commonwealth, London, 1919, pp. 13-14.

45. Milner Papers, Additional Papers, c.703, ff. 18-22, Milner to Amery, 30 December 1919.

46. Milner Papers, Additional Papers, c.703, ff. 25-26, Amery to Milner, 8 January 1920.

47. Milner Papers, Additional Papers, c.703, ff. 46-47, Milner to Amery, 17 January 1920.

48. Lloyd George Papers, F/39/2/22, W.M. Hughes to Lloyd George, no date, but circa. October 1920 since forward by Milner with accompanying note dated 8 October 1920, also, Lloyd George Papers, F/39/2/22.

49. Lloyd George Papers, F/39/2/22, Milner to Lloyd George, 8 October 1920.

50. NAC, Meighen Papers, C3226, ff. 17530-31, Meighen to Amery, 26 November 1920.

51. Milner Papers, Additional Papers, c.700, ff.275-282, Milner to Meighen, 4 October 1920.

52. NAC, Borden Papers, C4427, ff. 140858-60, Christie to Borden, 14 July 1921.

53. Lloyd George Papers, F/25/1/47, Amery to Hankey, 24 June 1921.

54. John Barnes and David Nicholson, eds., The Leo Amery Diaries: vol. 1, London, 1980, pp. 273-75, Amery to J. Smuts, 20 June 1921.

55. NAC, Borden Papers, C4439, ff. 159740-44, Amery to Borden, 11 May 1921.

56. PRO, FO 371/7909, E12276/27/44, minute by E.A. Crowe, 6 November 1922.

57. PRO, FO 371/5700, A3761/3560/45, minute by Mitevic 31 May 1921.

58. Ibid., minute by H. Malkin, 1 June 1921.

59. Ibid., memorandum by C.J.B. Hurst, 2 June 1921.

60. PRO, FO 371/10564, W5271/4972/50, Thomas to Byng, 23 June 1924.

61. Ibid.

62. NAC, King Papers, C2272, ff. 92976-78, O.D. Skelton to F.A. MacGregor, private secretary of M. King, 26 June 1924.

63. NAC, King Papers, C2476, f. 43187, memorandum by O.D. Skelton, 1 August 1924. Although the MacDonald ministry was blamed for the idea of including opposition representatives in the conference, the concept was credited to Borden. NAC, Borden Papers, C4439, ff. 159740-44, Amery to Borden, 11 May 1921.

64. PRO, CO 532/274/37810.

65. NAC, King Papers, C2476, f. 43187, memorandum by O.D. Skelton, 1 August 1924.

66. PRO, FO 371/10564, W5271/4972/50, Thomas to Byng, 25 June 1924.

CHAPTER 6

1924-1926: THE LAST SUBSTANTIAL EFFORTS TO RETAIN FORMAL IMPERIAL DIPLOMATIC UNITY

The collapse of the Labour Government and the subsequent general election brought Stanley Baldwin and the Conservatives back to power. It was the task of this second Baldwin ministry, in power until 1929, to preside over the final decline of formal imperial diplomatic unity. The new Conservative Government contained many familiar faces such as Austen Chamberlain at the Foreign Office. Leo Amery's personal ambition of nearly two decades was realised when he assumed the lead at the Colonial Office. Curzon did not return to his former post at the Foreign Office but was demoted to Lord President of the Council where he remained until his death in 1925. One surprising appointment for a Conservative ministry was Winston Churchill who as a Liberal MP had served so prominently in the Lloyd George coalition. Churchill's place in the Cabinet was even more dramatic since Baldwin had placed him in the Treasury. The interactions of Baldwin, Chamberlain, Churchill and Amery, and particularly between Chamberlain and Amery, left a deep impression upon imperial relations in these critical years.

Between 1924 and 1926, the British became more aware of the changes occurring in imperial foreign policy. From 1924 until the negotiation of the Locarno agreements, the collapse of imperial diplomatic unity was not regarded as imminent by many in British Government. The Locarno agreements of 1925, also, did not indicate to Whitehall that formal unity was over. The Locarno agreements convinced many in the British

Government that Britain must act quickly and competently to preserve imperial diplomatic unity. Within the key offices in Whitehall, these years stand out for the high degree of consciousness of imperial relations, and an unrealistic degree of optimism about the future. From the Locarno treaties until the Imperial Conference of 1926, the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office (and later the Dominions Office which was created in 1925) made concerted efforts to conceive and execute schemes to ensure diplomatic unity. The refusal by some Dominions, particularly Canada, to accept these initiatives spelt the schemes' doom. These initiatives were not without merit, but they had come too late. From 1924 to 1926, Whitehall deluded itself that its schemes were sufficient to preserve imperial diplomatic unity. Until 1926 Britain believed imperial diplomatic unity might be salvaged. When the Imperial Conference of 1926 was over, however, Britain acknowledged that imperial diplomatic unity, in the formal sense, was almost over. Whitehall then scurried to find comfort in the advent of informal diplomatic unity.

The Need For Action: a growing consciousness

The Labour Party's defeat at the polls in October 1924 left in limbo the matter of a constitutional meeting with Dominion leaders. The fate of the proposed constitutional meeting was one of the first decisions which Austen Chamberlain, MacDonald's successor in the Foreign Office, and the new Colonial Secretary, Leo Amery, had to make. Chamberlain and Amery agreed, after reflection, to cancel the meeting. The necessity of this decision, however, meant that imperial matters took an early priority for the new

Conservative ministry. Now the need for action embraced even the Colonial Secretary and the Foreign Secretary. It was the beginning of something quite new; a Foreign Secretary taking a keen interest in the imperial component of foreign affairs. Even more remarkably, this Foreign Secretary was willing to cooperate and discuss the matter with the Colonial Secretary.

The speed with which attention was given to the imperial relations deserves some note. On 7 November 1924 the new Conservative Government announced the composition of its Cabinet. Within five days, the Cabinet had its first meeting and two days later, on the 14 November 1924, Chamberlain was corresponding with Amery on the formation of a joint committee to examine the question of consulting the Dominions on foreign affairs.¹ While such speedy execution was characteristic of Amery, who had kept the Dominions foremost in his mind for a decade and a half, the promptitude was more unexpected from Chamberlain who had had little involvement in the Dominion question in the past. His interest was aroused, it seems, when his officials came forward to explain the preparations that MacDonald, his Labour predecessor, had made.

In 1924, one of the first memoranda Chamberlain read as the new Foreign Secretary concerned consultation with the Dominions. This memorandum, prepared by a Foreign Office official for Chamberlain, explained the history and current status of the issue. It discussed how the Dominions were kept informed, through weekly narrative dispatches and copies of the summary prepared for Cabinet. Mentioning briefly the resolution concerning treaties passed at the Imperial Conference of 1923, it observed that the current phase in imperial relations stemmed from MacDonald's misunderstandings

with the Dominions during the Lausanne Treaty. In particular, the memorandum explained how MacDonald's difficulties with Canada had 'led him to draw attention to the necessity of finding some better method for consulting with Dominions.' Noting that invitations had been issued to a constitutional meeting, the memorandum added, 'the Dominions were very half-hearted on the subject but in the main have now agreed to the idea of such a conference, but the date at which it is to meet remains unsettled.' After a conversation with N.W. Rowell, a former minister in Borden's Government, and the appointment of an Irish Free State representative to Washington, MacDonald had established a joint committee of the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office to prepare proposals for when the constitutional gathering occurred. Chamberlain had to decide whether or not to continue with this initiative.²

He immediately contacted Amery to say that he was keen that the joint committee should proceed. This was in keeping with Chamberlain's emerging belief at the time that 'the essence of our policy is that the British Empire is one and indivisible.'³ Yet while Chamberlain favoured a joint committee to explore possible methods of consultation, he was not enthusiastic about a constitutional gathering. Amery, once a supporter of such a gathering, now also found it undesirable. In a telegram to the Dominions in early December, he tried to distance the new government from MacDonald's attempts to organise a constitutional conference. Amery accused MacDonald of forging ahead when the Dominions obviously did not wish the gathering, although whether or not he actually believed this is questionable. Amery, with more sincerity, acknowledged that more time for preparation was

needed, because Whitehall was still unsure about how to achieve its goals. Consequently, the constitutional gathering envisioned by MacDonald was postponed forever.⁴ There was relief in Canada, where the gathering held little appeal.⁵

In postponing the constitutional conference, Amery stressed to the Dominions that the matter of consultation remained in the forefront of Whitehall's attentions, and that other avenues of improving consultation would be explored. This, of course, raised the question of what routes this might involve. In these early months Amery had a much clearer sense of how he wished to proceed than Chamberlain did. Amery was back on target with his desire to encourage the use of the Dominion High Commissioners in London. Chamberlain did not possess such a lucid vision; in these early months Chamberlain was clearer about what he did not want than what he did want in British-Dominion relations.

Chamberlain rejected the suggestion that the Foreign Office should relieve the Colonial Office of its duties by communicating directly with the Dominions on foreign policy. This suggestion came as the result of a telegram from the Canadian Government to Amery recommending that in order to improve consultation the Canadian Minister of External Affairs should communicate directly with the Foreign Office. While the proposal drew few comments from Foreign Office officials⁶, Chamberlain composed a lengthy memorandum, to be considered in British circles, in which he firmly opposed the proposition. He refused to consider direct communication with the Dominions because that would place them on a par with foreign countries. On a more practical level, Chamberlain believed that the degree of consultation before action that Canada appeared to

enviseage would cripple the execution of foreign policy. He believed it essential that 'in a crisis the British Empire must not be paralysed because nowhere in that Empire has anyone the right to speak or act on its behalf.'⁷

This Canadian telegram was passed on to the joint committee of the Foreign Office and Colonial Office for examination and reply. Although the matter of direct communication with Canada was discussed, attention focused on King's comments regarding the role of the Dominion High Commissioners. The joint committee sent no response to King's telegram. This decision was taken despite consideration of Chamberlain's memorandum, which outlined several responses, all of which stressed the need to assure the Dominions that they would be kept informed and consulted as best could be done.⁸

Although the Canadian telegram failed to resolve the difficulties surrounding consultation, it did foreshadow changes. The most fascinating point the telegram highlights is Chamberlain's imperial attitude on the eve of great alterations in the imperial relationship. Anxious to appease the Dominions, Chamberlain was unwilling to dissolve imperial ties by having the Foreign Office confer directly with the Dominions. This would be an admission, he felt, that the relations between the Dominions and Britain had become those of foreign countries. Chamberlain, moreover, rejected any method that might hinder the swift execution of foreign policy. Chamberlain's imperial vision was based on preserving the unity of the Empire. What he could not foresee was that within a few years he would reverse his present position by

pursuing direct communications on foreign policy with the Dominions.

Amery and Chamberlain: a new higher level of involvement

One of the unfortunate ironies of the period 1924-1926 is that in many respects attention to the Dominions had never been sustained at such a high level of interaction between the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office. Instances had occurred in the past when the Foreign Secretary intervened on particular issues, but Austen Chamberlain showed a more enduring interest in imperial relations than his predecessors had. This offered potential for resolving the present impasse in reshaping imperial relations. Difficulty in redefining imperial relations arose because both Chamberlain and Amery failed to appreciate the new imperial climate. Thus, instead of leading to a productive partnership, the co-existence of an involved Foreign Secretary and an energetic Colonial Secretary increased dissension.

When Leo Amery took over as Colonial Secretary, it marked the realisation of his professional ambition. Although groomed for the post, he had been passed over as Milner's successor in 1921, in favour of Churchill, and lost out to Devonshire in Bonar Law's ministry. With Amery now in the Colonial Office there was an informed and a committed Colonial Secretary. He was conscious of the evolving relations with the Dominions. Amery was also truly a protégé of Milner both in the department and in his imperial vision. Amery had first come into contact with Milner in the latter's famous 'kindergarten' in South Africa, while Milner was the High Commissioner there. Like so many of Milner's young followers,

Amery had a sense of the grandness of the British Empire and the influence it wielded internationally. Like Milner, he also recognised that with the new conditions created by and in the aftermath of the First World War, a new type of relationship had to be forged with the Dominions to preserve the fabric of unity. By 1924, Amery had retained his determination to maintain the unity, but he was sufficiently progressive to recognise that it had to be achieved in a different way. It was in striking out in another direction that Amery was to differ from his mentor, Milner. One of the characteristics of Milner's philosophy as Colonial Secretary was that new ways of cooperating with the Dominions had to be found. But instead of increasing the role of the Colonial Office, Milner foresaw its diminishing involvement and anticipated that the relations between the Dominions and Britain would primarily be conducted through the Prime Minister and the Foreign Office and not the Colonial Office. What marked Amery's terms at the Colonial Office and later at the Dominions Office, was his determination to uphold and enhance these departments' involvement in British-Dominion relations.

Other attributes distinguished Amery from Milner. Amery remained highly energetic, though not always positively so, and Milner's attempts to refine these energies had failed. Whereas Milner had adopted the principle that initiatives had to come from the Dominions, Amery was forever conceiving one scheme after another in which Britain took the initiative in reshaping imperial relations. Where Milner commanded the respect of his colleagues, which did much to elevate the stature of the Colonial Office, Amery was tolerated but never

greatly respected by his staff. Finally, if Milner is to be remembered for his strong South African leanings, Canada was the one that had the strongest pull for Amery. His wife was a Canadian, his younger son, Julian, was a godson of Sir Robert Borden, and Amery made a point throughout his political career of cultivating his Canadian contacts and staying informed of Canadian sentiment.

Chamberlain, Amery's opposite number in the Foreign Office, was something of a contrast. Unlike Amery, Chamberlain did not possess a long record of interest in imperial affairs. Indeed, it was not until he took office in 1924 that he became involved, but he did then have an impact which has not received sufficient attention. If ever there was the need to judge a person in his time and setting in order to obtain a more accurate view, it is with Austen Chamberlain. The eldest son of Joseph Chamberlain, the famous Colonial Secretary at the turn of the century, and half-brother to Neville Chamberlain, Austen has been lost in their historical shadows.⁹ Few historians have been kind to Austen¹⁰, portraying him as a poor copy of his father. Yet he enjoyed a long political career, held most of the leading posts in Cabinet, apart from Prime Minister, commanded the respect of his colleagues and wielded power within the Conservative party. Historians may prefer to emphasise what Chamberlain did not achieve and view him as a failure because he never occupied 10 Downing Street. It is important, however, to examine what Chamberlain did accomplish. Among other things, as Foreign Secretary he was actively involved in determining the role of the Dominions in foreign affairs. As one biographer noted, with disparaging approval: after

Locarno, Chamberlain's 'own preoccupations as Foreign Secretary became increasingly imperial rather than continental.'¹¹ Initially, Chamberlain hoped that unity could be maintained. When it became clear that such men as Mackenzie King did not want to remain in the imperial fold, Chamberlain then displayed foresight in choosing to build for the future by accommodating the Dominions and laying the ground for informal imperial unity in diplomatic affairs. It is difficult not to speculate that Chamberlain was in office at the wrong time. Of all the Foreign Secretaries in the 1920s, he most of all appreciated the need for the Dominions' participation and most conscientiously solicited their views and followed them. The problem was that while Chamberlain's skills might have succeeded in the early 1920s in extending the life of imperial unity, they were misplaced in the climate after the Imperial Conference of 1923. Chamberlain learned the hard way that it was no longer realistic to hope for the continuation of formal unity. But in this, too, he displayed foresight. Recognising new circumstances and redirecting the energies of the Foreign Office, he helped to lay the foundations of informal unity. This achievement secured informal unity during the Second World War and up to the Suez Crisis of 1956. All this, of course, is getting ahead of the story. In the meantime a few more efforts were made to save formal diplomatic unity. But it was a struggle exacerbated in no small part by tensions and disagreements between the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office. The conflicts were intensified by the ill-will which developed between Amery and Chamberlain. Signs of these difficulties began to emerge in the early months of the new administration.

Dominion High Commissioners: the untapped solution?

By the autumn of 1924 there were not many options open to Whitehall for resolving the difficulty of adequate consultation and salvaging unity. Placing the onus on the Dominions remained the prevailing option. It was, therefore, on this premise that the potential of utilising the Dominion High Commissioners was regarded with new enthusiasm. Amery embraced the concept and his zeal for this scheme of consultation made it easy for him to abandon MacDonald's proposed constitutional gathering.

From 1924 until 1928, Amery pursued attempts to build this new consultative structure on the foundation of the High Commissioner. In 1924, this attempt to build on the High Commissioner seemed to offer a chance of preserving unity, particularly in the early months of the Conservative administration, before the Locarno negotiations arose. But in the aftermath of the Imperial Conference of 1926, his scheme was inappropriate and unrealistic. Its eventual collapse can be ascribed to the opposition of Austen Chamberlain and of certain Dominions. Mackenzie King in Canada was one of the most vocal opponents and the prime factor in the scheme's collapse.

The notion of having the High Commissioner fill the gap for consultation had been mooted since the outset of the First World War. In 1914, the idea was promoted by Canada's new acting-High Commissioner to London, George Perley. Sent to fill the vacancy created by the death of Lord Strathcona, Perley was asked to review this 'virtually nominal' office and make recommendations. He proposed that the High Commissioner should be a member of the Canadian Cabinet in order to give

clout to the office in British circles.¹² The Canadian Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden, was not receptive to the plan either in 1914 or in 1917 when Perley again tried to raise the matter.¹³

After the First World War, the idea of the Dominions appointing a resident minister in London gained in popularity. Encouraged by the efficiency and success of the Imperial War Cabinet, this War Cabinet seemed to many contemporaries the ideal mechanism. During the war, the Dominion Prime Ministers had been on hand to expedite decisions. In peacetime, however, each Dominion Prime Minister would have to be replaced by a resident minister who would be in constant consultation with his own Dominion. This minister, would not only relay information from the British Government, but be empowered to speak for his government. While the idea was discussed with relative frequency in Whitehall, it was never formally proposed to the Dominions. Had the constitutional conference gone ahead as planned immediately after the war, the scheme might have been debated. Failure to take steps to implement it can be attributed primarily to lack of support from the Dominions. Borden was never quite comfortable with the idea and King not at all. When in 1922, Milner suggested to him that Canada should place a minister in London, King chose to ignore the proposal.¹⁴ Then in 1923, Stanley Bruce, the Australian Prime Minister, voiced his support for resident ministers. While this was warmly greeted in the Foreign Office¹⁵, renewed efforts to proceed with the plan collapsed when South Africa spoke out against it.¹⁶ Clearly by 1923, matters had progressed too far to hope that all the Dominions, notably Canada, South Africa and the Irish Free State would

endorse a concept that had the lingering sense of an Imperial Cabinet, which they felt would undermine the sovereignty of their own cabinets. Although the plan for resident ministers was never adopted, the notion of empowering Dominion representatives to act as intermediaries between the British Government and the home governments persisted long enough to reappear in the guise of Amery's proposal for the High Commissioners in the years 1924-28.

Within days of assuming office in November 1924, Amery had a brief meeting with each High Commissioner. He decided to convince Baldwin to host an informal tea for the High Commissioners at 10 Downing Street and invite Chamberlain to say a few words on foreign affairs.¹⁷ The tea went ahead with Chamberlain's talk focusing on Egypt: he expressed the hope that the Dominions would sign the Protocol and invited the Dominions' representatives to discuss foreign affairs with him.¹⁸ Amery judged this tea a great success, believing that he, Baldwin and Chamberlain had gone as far as they could 'without forcing the hands of the Dominion Governments by treating the High Commissioners as their diplomatic representatives.'¹⁹ Amery may have believed that he had initiated a new form of consultation, but he was to receive opposition to his scheme from Chamberlain and from King.

Chamberlain could not escape consideration of this plan to improve consultation with the Dominions. Not only was Amery pressing him, but so too was Phillip Kerr. Kerr, a secretary to Lloyd George from 1916 to 1921, had a strong interest in imperial matters as shown in his association with the Round Table group. He edited The Round Table journal from 1910 to 1916. In the autumn of 1924, Kerr wrote a letter to

The Times under the pseudonym 'Voyageur'.²⁰ Based on his three years of travel in Canada, Kerr gave his impressions of Canadian attitudes, particularly on imperial matters. When Kerr heard that Chamberlain had enquired who was the author of the letter, Kerr wrote directly to Chamberlain with recommendations on saving imperial unity. What was lacking, Kerr argued, was 'the element of constant personal contact'. Kerr, like Amery, concluded that the best solution centred on the High Commissioners. Unlike Amery, Kerr recognised that the British had to proceed slowly to avoid aggravating suspicions among Dominion Prime Ministers that their High Commissioners were 'trying to become absentee foreign ministers'. Kerr also acknowledged the fear in some Dominions that casual discussion among these ministers in London might commit the Dominions to imperial initiatives without prior consultation.

With this in mind, Kerr recommended that Chamberlain should 'inaugurate the habit' of having regular, informal talks with each High Commissioner on pressing foreign matters. Kerr hoped that the High Commissioner could add that little extra detail to the telegrams sent from the Colonial Office and provide an impression of the 'atmosphere' in the Dominions. He believed it important to keep such meetings low-key, but thought that in time they might develop into a system of consultation 'which would prevent incidents like those of Chanak'.²¹

Chamberlain did not oppose the notion of utilising the High Commissioners but was unwilling to have regular, informal meetings with them. Forwarding Kerr's letter to Amery, he distanced himself from the scheme, fearing to proceed with it.

Fortified by the opinion of Lord Balfour, who served as the British Prime Minister from 1902 to 1905, Chamberlain worried that the plan suggested assimilating 'the position of High Commissioners to that of Foreign Ambassadors'. This, he argued, would undermine the indivisibility of imperial policy. He was of course willing to meet High Commissioners from time to time when they requested it.²²

Chamberlain's anxiety about striking the right balance with the High Commissioners soon ended when Mackenzie King put an end to the affair. Perhaps if Amery had followed Kerr's cautious approach more closely then matters might have been more successful. But a more realistic view would be that even under the most ideal conditions, the scheme was doomed once King decided to block it. Amery's clever informal tea with Baldwin, Chamberlain and the High Commissioners triggered King's apprehensions about Whitehall's intentions. King learned of this event from newspaper clippings and a letter from Peter Larkin, Canada's High Commissioner, whom King had appointed as Perley's successor in 1922. According to Larkin's account, Baldwin was 'anxious' that the Dominion Governments stay 'well-informed on everything concerning the Empire's Foreign policy'. Baldwin expressed interest in considering any scheme which might offer a better 'way of keeping touch' other than through the High Commissioners, but until then he proposed to continue to call the High Commissioners together to keep them informed on foreign affairs.²³

The informal gathering aroused King's fears of a centralist plot in London. Although Larkin mentioned only Baldwin, King was convinced that 'it was one of Amery's

schemes to set up a round table council in London'. Such a potential decision-making body would undermine the autonomy of Canada in foreign affairs. King, moreover, feared that this was a stratagem to 'pull' Canada into European affairs²⁴ and Britain's future wars.²⁵ Echoing this fear was O.D. Skelton, the future Canadian Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, who believed that the meeting of a 'collective circle' must be avoided.²⁶ King conveyed to Larkin his displeasure at the recent meeting of the High Commissioners and opposed regular gatherings, as this council, as he now phrased it, might easily assume powers it did not have. Writing of the difficulties, King noted,

We see...grave possibilities of differences arising with some of our sister-dominions or between our own Dominion and the Mother Country, if it should ever come to be assumed that meetings of the kind had a significance from the point of view of the relations of the dominions to the Mother Country. It is difficult to see how some such view will not come to be very quickly accepted were any practice followed which might afford grounds for it.²⁷

Following King's instructions, Larkin extracted from Amery a promise that the Colonial Secretary would abide by King's wishes and not pursue collective gatherings of the High Commissioners.²⁸ Larkin tried to soothe any misunderstandings with King by stressing that the High Commissioners' gatherings were inoffensive since they discussed matters such as the British Empire Exhibition. He promised, however, that if he ever became 'entrapped' in a meeting with Amery and Chamberlain, he would prefix every comment with 'no authority from my Government to express'.²⁹

King was not content to leave the matter there and told Amery that he did not want to alter Britain's direct

communication with Ottawa. Again, King returned to his theme of responsibility, and asserted that it was Britain's responsibility to communicate all queries directly to Ottawa. King informed Britain that Canada would not support any schemes, such as using the Canadian High Commissioner. King wanted all consultation to be conducted directly between London and Ottawa. King believed that consultative schemes such as the High Commissioners tended 'to obscure or lessen full responsibility of [the British and Canadian governments]... themselves deciding upon questions that may demand consultation most appropriate method of consultation and upon the extent of their obligations in all such matters [sic].' He then recommended that the High Commissioner receive copies of all correspondence that passed between Britain and Canada.³⁰ An inter-departmental committee of the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office rejected this suggestion. In a drafted response, never sent, this inter-departmental committee observed that the High Commissioner already saw most of the official despatches between the two governments. The chief exceptions to this were those dealing with foreign affairs which were highly confidential. An earlier arrangement made with Australia placed R.G. Casey as a liaison officer in the Cabinet Office. In his capacity as a liaison officer between the British and Australian Governments, Casey saw despatches on foreign affairs. He did not possess copies of them, but was permitted to discuss the contents with the Australian Government.³¹

Matters rested there for the time being: the chance of establishing a mechanism with the High Commissioners for improved consultation had now almost vanished. But the scheme

was not permanently abandoned because Amery tried to resurrect it in 1926, and again in 1927. Curiously, in his second strong bid in 1926, Amery had the support of Chamberlain.

In 1924, Chamberlain's and King both opposed using the High Commissioners for improved consultation because both feared that autonomy would be endangered. King and Chamberlain differed, however, in their identification of what aspect of autonomy was under threat. Regular meetings, Chamberlain believed, implied foreign status and therefore undermined imperial unity. Conversely, King feared that regular meetings would undermine Canadian autonomy. Who was right? If the High Commissioner carried on without any addition to his status, such as the ability to represent Canada in imperial foreign policy discussions, then King was closer to the truth. Either way, the matter ended before it effectively got started. In time, Chamberlain dismissed King's reservations and supported the idea of utilising the High Commissioners to improve communication and salvage unity. But the proposal was stillborn. Canada never supported it.

As has been already explored, King refused Canadian participation in any gatherings of the High Commissioners because these implied a decision-making body. This much he had made clear to Amery. An important component in King's refusal, however, was his inability to make the mental leap necessary to envisage an expansion of the post of High Commissioner to encompass foreign affairs. What was not appreciated in Whitehall was that hesitancy on the part of Canadian Prime Ministers reflected their failure to enlarge the limited view they held regarding the High Commissioner's post. The collapse of Amery's scheme affords an opportunity

to examine the role of the High Commissioner from the Canadian perspective.

A striking feature of the Canadian High Commission in London in the 1920s was how little it had evolved since its inception in 1880. The post remained restricted primarily because the Canadian Government refused to let it keep pace and grow with its own expanding autonomy. In 1880 the chief motivation in placing a Canadian representative in Britain was to give a voice to Canadian interests, primarily those of trade and emigration. While Sir John A. Macdonald, the Canadian Prime Minister, envisioned a diplomatic element to the post, Whitehall was insistent that no diplomatic status be attached to the title. Optimistically, Macdonald continued to imply a diplomatic dimension when he informed the Canadian House of Commons that Canada's new representative would give 'a higher status to Canadian commerce and more direct means of communication with the various nations.'³² Ironically, it was Macdonald who instigated the tradition of excluding the High Commissioner from foreign affairs and who was, moreover, instrumental in limiting the scope of the High Commissioner's authority to represent the Canadian Government. Macdonald guarded jealously the Prime Minister's right to be the only person who spoke for and committed Canada in imperial and external matters. This precedent was firmly set when the first Imperial Conference was held in 1887, and Macdonald sent representatives with restricted authority.³³

The jealousy with which Macdonald defended the Prime Minister's dominance in imperial and external matters initiated difficulties which continued to afflict the High Commissioner's post from its inception.³⁴ The possessive

manner of the Prime Minister was mirrored in the actions of government departments which, in order to defend their domain of power, communicated directly with their British counterparts. These limitations prevented the High Commissioner's role from expanding significantly in its first three decades.

During those decades, only three men held the post. All were of high calibre, the first two, Alexander Galt³⁵ and Sir Charles Tupper³⁶, having served in Macdonald's cabinet. The third appointee was Sir Donald Smith, a former governor of the Hudson Bay Company and a prominent financier of the Canadian Pacific Railway, who later became Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal.³⁷ Despite the scope of their skills, the participation of all three was limited to commercial and emigration matters. Advancement of the office was particularly hindered by Strathcona's term. Serving from 1896 until his death in 1914, at the age of ninety-three, Strathcona's lack of vigour in his later years reduced the office to a nominal existence.

The inactivity of the High Commissioner's office prompted Sir Robert Borden, the Canadian Prime Minister, to review the office and its direction, but his decision to appoint Perley as only acting-High Commissioner reflected his degree of ambivalence about the office. Perley was elevated to permanent High Commissioner only in 1917 after he had resigned from the Borden's cabinet.³⁸ While Perley was charged with the task of assessing the office's duties and making recommendations, Borden ignored all his suggestions that greater stature be given to the post. Borden's unwillingness to elevate the office showed the British that he too shared Macdonald's and Laurier's reservations about the degree of power that should

be conceded to the office. Moreover, Borden's high profile in London during the war years consolidated the notion that the British Government had to deal directly with the Canadian Prime Minister, thus relegating the High Commissioner to the sidelines in matters beyond commercial interests.³⁹

While Perley was unsuccessful in enhancing the stature of the High Commissioner, he did improve its operations as a functional unit and this contributed to and facilitated the expansion of its duties during the war, when Perley was the Canadian Cabinet Minister in charge of overseas military forces. It was during this time that the High Commissioner was given access to official correspondence exchanged between the British and Canadian Governments. This arrangement, however, the High Commissioner found frustrating. Although he was made privy to more information, he remained an observer, not a participant, in many instances, especially those regarding foreign matters.⁴⁰

The electoral victory of the Liberals brought a new High Commissioner, Peter Larkin, to London early in 1922. In his instructions, Mackenzie King showed that he too was adhering to the tradition whereby duties were confined to the trade sphere. Larkin, like Perley, tried to add stature to the post, but was never as assertive in practice as in his aspirations.⁴¹ He was content, it seems, largely to defend his existing authority and, unlike Perley, he showed hypersensitivity to any British slights on Canada and a readiness to convey these to King.⁴² Larkin sent frequent correspondence, but this was not reciprocated by King. Where Larkin would write privately with great regularity and detail, King responded in kind at best two times a year and then

confined the letters to commercial and trade affairs.⁴³ Perhaps in this too, King was maintaining the tradition that it was agreeable that the High Commissioner be informed of the official correspondence and preparations for Imperial Conferences. He was hesitant to have the High Commissioner as any more than an observer in the imperial relations, particularly foreign affairs, between Canada and Britain. This position reflected more on King's limitations than Larkin's because if anyone could have won King's confidence with loyalties exclusively Canadian it was Larkin. King himself was pleased with the strong stance that Larkin took in defending Canada's image and the steady supply of information from the High Commission.⁴⁴ But even with this ideal personnel, King, like all his predecessors, was incapable of relinquishing the Prime Minister's exclusive jurisdiction over the direction of foreign policy. This inability to extend any role to the High Commissioner in foreign matters was as influential as his fear that Larkin's participation in informal meetings or informal briefing sessions on foreign policy was a threat to Canadian autonomy. This lack of imagination and faith in the High Commissioner on the part of King seems to have escaped the attention of Whitehall, who tried again, in vain, to resurrect the scheme of utilising the High Commissioners to solve the problem of consultation.

Locarno treaties: exception or precedent

The peace settlement of 1919 did little to alleviate the struggles between Germany and France. The slight advantage enjoyed by France immediately after the First World War remained precarious as France continued to fear German

aggression. French apprehension was not relieved by post-war British policy. Not only did isolationism prevail in many British quarters, but more disturbing was growing British sympathy for Germany and the belief that the threat of German aggression across its western borders had receded. These British sentiments produced an unwillingness to enter into an alliance with France against Germany. It was against this landscape that the Entente Cordiale between France and Britain, under strain since 1919, collapsed altogether in 1923.

Tension in Europe continued to mount through the early 1920s and reached a pitch when France marched into the Ruhr to extract war reparations which Germany had been unwilling to make. While action had to be taken to restore stability and alleviate France's fears of German aggression, Britain remained reluctant to become involved. Efforts to ease tensions occurred in 1924 with the proposed Geneva Protocol, where members of the League of Nations agreed to submit disputes to arbitration, when negotiations failed, and to aid the victim of an aggressor. The Protocol was not approved by the British Parliament before the MacDonald Government left office and it soon collapsed against a wave of opposition in the second Baldwin ministry. The continuing difficulties in Europe thus passed to the new Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain.

Chamberlain, who was pro-French, favoured a pact with France to protect it against Germany. This scheme met strong opposition in the Cabinet. For some ministers this stemmed from isolationistic tendencies, for others, it came from pro-German leanings. It was the German Foreign Secretary, Gustav

Stresemann, encouraged by the British Ambassador at Berlin, D'Abernon, who proposed an accord whereby Britain, Germany and France could enter a non-aggression pact. Although it took considerable debate to secure agreement in Cabinet, in time, approval was given and negotiations eventually produced the Locarno treaties of 1925. The treaties were limited since they covered only the western part of the German borders. But they were regarded as a victory by the British pro-German camp, who regarded them as ideally suited for Britain in that they encouraged peace and stability with minimum commitment.⁴⁵

On the imperial side, Whitehall regarded the treaties as a victory because they evaded commitment to France and kept Britain's obligations in Europe minimal, thus allowing Britain to concentrate on its imperial interests. As events unfolded in connection with the Locarno treaties, the treaties damaged imperial interests. They are regarded as the final blow to attempts to maintain imperial unity.⁴⁶ What is particularly devastating was that the British Government negotiated and signed the treaties without involving the Dominions. The failure of Chamberlain and the Foreign Office to attempt to involve the Dominions seemed to suggest that Chamberlain and the Foreign Office too had abandoned all pretence of maintaining imperial unity, or, that they had deliberately ignored the Dominions as they no longer believed in the viability of imperial unity.

Explaining the matter is not easy, given the contradictions in the Foreign Office's thinking. On the one hand, the Foreign Office consciously excluded the Dominions. But it is difficult to infer from this that the Foreign Office broke with, or indeed abandoned the idea of the unity. Both

during the negotiations, and even more so in the aftermath of the signing, the Foreign Office fought to counter any supposition that it had compromised or forsaken imperial unity. These were exceptional circumstances, officials reasoned, and not precedent-setting. More important, though, the argument began to turn more directly on the issue of war and the role of the Dominions.

Exclusion of the Dominions from the Locarno negotiations was almost the natural corollary to events surrounding the Geneva Protocol. When Chamberlain took over at the Foreign Office he was encouraged by Lord Robert Cecil, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who had a long-standing involvement in the League of Nations, to explore fully the Dominions' views. Cecil was apprehensive since he knew the Dominions would 'never accept the Protocol', and that to pursue the issue would 'cause a breach in the unity of the Empire'. He recommended that a special committee, with Dominion representatives, should consider the Protocol in order to prevent a breach in unity.⁴⁷ While Chamberlain agreed that the Dominions should be kept informed, he saw this as Amery's duty. In the months which followed, as the details of a military pact were worked out, Chamberlain was annoyed that the Foreign Office was being portrayed as indifferent to the Dominions because of the Colonial Office's inefficiency in forwarding the information that the Foreign Office had transmitted.⁴⁸ In the spring of 1925, it became apparent to Whitehall that not all the Dominions would agree to be parties to a military pact. Imperialists had a growing sense that for Britain to enter a security pact would jeopardise imperial unity.⁴⁹ Amery was disturbed by this, but his apprehensions

were dismissed by Chamberlain, who was coming around to the view that he must go ahead without the Dominions. He believed that the security of Britain required stability on the Continent and he was anxious to secure it, with or without the Dominions.⁵⁰

Chamberlain proceeded with the negotiations without even attempting to include the Dominions in the process. Amery did try to defend the rights of the Dominions to participate, but he was singularly ineffectual in arguing his case. As Eyre Crowe, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, observed, Amery,

as usual, dilated on the impossibility of doing anything, because the Dominions would never agree to anything being done. All that was required was to avoid the danger of any talk of entanglements, and to restrict ourselves to developing moral atmosphere by pacific methods, to the exclusion of anything to do with war, or disarmament, or force, or violence. I confess I have never heard even Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, in his most wooly-headed [sic] pronouncements, talk such utter rubbish as Mr. Amery poured forth.⁵¹

Chamberlain, believing that time was of the essence, and that a large delegation would jeopardise the negotiations, proceeded alone. He considered it essential for the security of Britain that a security pact be reached in Europe.

One reason for Chamberlain's effectiveness in executing the negotiations without the Dominions, was that the Dominions had acquiesced and seemed content to remain observers. To men like King, this was the ideal arrangement and the fruition of his dream of distancing Canada from international responsibility. If Chamberlain went ahead without consulting or involving Canada in the negotiations, Canada would be under no obligation to be a party to the final treaties. For this

reason King was able to hail the treaties as a 'great achievement'⁵², and avoid ratifying them. King's counterpart in South Africa, General J. Hertzog, applauded the treaties as confirmation and recognition of the independent status of the Dominions.⁵³ Thus, for those who sought to end imperial unity and imperial commitment without choice, the Locarno Treaties appeared a triumph.

This disturbing precedent was not lost on the pro-imperialists. For men like Sir Robert Borden, the break with the tradition that the Dominions should be included in negotiations, left him distraught.⁵⁴ Worse still, for men like Loring Christie and Phillip Kerr, it seemed an abject betrayal. As Christie concluded, 'anyone from a Dominion must feel a bit of a fool when he remembers that Austen Chamberlain, in throwing out the Protocol, seemed to invoke the Dominions' objections and the idea of diplomatic unity, and that in his next diplomatic breath at Locarno he threw the idea overboard.' But for all his displeasure, Christie did not wholly blame the Foreign Office, observing: 'I'll freely confess that the Dominions themselves have done little to give practical effect to the idea of partnership in the past few years.'⁵⁵ Kerr placed Locarno in a different category from Chanak and Lausanne. Here was 'Austen Chamberlain making an enormous commitment to go to war, not for a year or two, but forever, and telling the Dominions that it really doesn't matter whether they agree with it or not.'⁵⁶

Kerr's conclusion is interesting: had Britain really been so bold as to break with all sense of unity? It seemed that Britain had broken not only diplomatic unity, but also had broken unity under one Crown. Previously it was agreed that

the Crown was one entity and as such when the Crown was at war all of the British Empire was at war. Was Britain now stating that the Crown was a divisible entity because Britain was prepared to go to war without the Dominions? An answer to this provides an insight into the boldness of the Foreign Office in proceeding without the Dominions. One concept which prevailed throughout the negotiations and the settlement was the Foreign Office's belief that if it came to war, the Dominions would come to Britain's defence. Chamberlain expressed this belief as early as April 1925 when he noted that, 'just as we should exert our whole strength to prevent an invasion of Australia or to protect the Canadian frontier if it were menaced, so we may expect the Dominions to join in what is equally an Imperial interest - the essential defence of the United Kingdom'.⁵⁷ A year later, still smarting under criticism that imperial unity had been disrupted, the Foreign Office clung to its belief that nothing had fundamentally changed. Unity remained intact, it argued: when the King declared war, it committed every part of the Empire. The Foreign Office did admit that it fell to the discretion of each Dominion whether or not it actively participated, but the prevailing assumption was that 'moral duty' to go to war would bring the Dominions to the active aid of Britain.⁵⁸ Amery and his officials considered the Foreign Office's view unrealistic. Chamberlain, however, was not alone in his conviction, as other prominent politicians, such as Lord Birkenhead, believed that if Britain had to go to the aid of Belgium or France then 'the Empire would go to war like one man, as they had before on a previous occasion.'⁵⁹ In terms of maintaining formal unity, Chamberlain deluded himself that

Locarno had not exacted a price. Yet his understanding reflected the beginnings of the search for informal imperial unity, primarily the assurance that if Britain faced a military threat the Dominions would come to its aid. Nevertheless, complete acceptance by Whitehall that formal unity had ended was still many months away. In the period leading up to the Imperial Conference of 1926, Whitehall renewed efforts to devise a mechanism for improved consultation and unity. For the moment, the Locarno treaties, from the Foreign Office's perspective, were an exception; it would take time before the precedent was acknowledged.

Preparations for the Imperial Conference: trying to keep the pieces together

It is interesting to note that throughout the Locarno negotiations, Chamberlain did not explore the implications regarding the Dominions. Suddenly once an agreement had been reached, officials became aware of the need to limit the damage the treaties might do. The top priority was to prevent any public display of disunity. It was primarily for this reason that the Foreign Office did not press the Dominions for ratification of the treaties. The Foreign Office concurred with the Australian Prime Minister, Stanley Bruce, that since not all Dominions were prepared to ratify the treaties, it was best not to press the issue since this would risk open disunity.⁶⁰ The Dominions Office sought to pass the matter to the Inter-Imperial Committee to suggest some 'formulas in descending scale of definiteness in lieu of actual adhesion involving Parliament ratification.'⁶¹ Chamberlain opposed the suggestion fearing that it would expose Whitehall to more

embarrassment if the Dominions rejected it. Instead, Chamberlain preferred to leave the question of Dominion support in abeyance until the Imperial Conference when the waters could be tested privately.⁶²

While soliciting commitment from the Dominions for the Locarno treaties was postponed until the autumn, officials in Whitehall experienced a lingering feeling that the treaties had demonstrated, yet again, the need to improve consultation so as to prevent similar incidents. Such thinking was reflected in an extensive memorandum prepared in the Foreign Office in January 1926.

Post-Locarno: Renewed search for unity

An awareness that the mechanism of consultation with the Dominions on foreign matters needed urgent overhauling constituted the prevailing theme of a memorandum prepared by Percy Koppel, a counsellor in the Foreign Office, in January 1926. The memorandum, which extended to almost twenty pages, provoked three months' discussion in the Foreign Office and proved essential in plotting its strategy for the forthcoming Imperial Conference. It was a virtuoso performance in analysing past efforts and speculating upon techniques which might hold imperial foreign policy together, but ultimately it was ineffectual.

Koppel concluded that the fundamental problem of imperial consultation had not changed since 1921, when Lloyd George observed that all the telegrams in the world could not replace the need to 'come into contact and thresh out' foreign policy. First, Koppel reviewed the various schemes which had been contemplated since 1917: an Imperial Parliament, an Imperial

Council, the presence of opposition parties at Imperial conferences, resident Dominion Cabinet ministers, an Imperial Secretariat, and added powers for High Commissioners. His summation was a depressing reminder of how little had gone right.⁶³ As C.J.B. Hurst observed after having read the memorandum, the numerous aborted schemes evoked a feeling of 'despair about ever getting any satisfactory steps taken in connection with the problem of effective consultation'.⁶⁴ Hurst may have been filled with despair, but Koppel remained optimistic. Acknowledging the prevailing consciousness of independent status as a 'bone of contention in local politics' in Canada and South Africa, he hoped that a solution could still be found if the Dominions could be convinced to place an agent in London to represent their views. He was particularly inspired by the Casey experiment.

Richard Casey had been sent to London by the Australian Government in 1924 as a liaison officer, to keep the Australian Government informed. He was located in the Cabinet Secretariat and given access to Foreign Office confidential prints, among other things. The success of Casey's appointment encouraged Koppel to promote the idea of each Dominion placing an additional representative in London, empowered to receive information on foreign affairs and to speak for each Dominion Government. Unlike those who wanted Dominion High Commissioners to assume these duties, Koppel considered the agent scheme more practicable. He had shrewdly gauged that the Dominions were unwilling to put trust in their High Commissioners. Although the duties of the Governors General in consultation had steadily declined, the Dominions

had neither increased the role of their High Commissioners nor indicated any inclination to do so.

In many respects Koppel's preference to have the Dominions place agents in London suggests that he was following the traditional Whitehall belief that the Dominions should come to London, not vice versa. In fact, Koppel was bolder; he believed that the Foreign Office had to interact directly with the Dominions. This intention was revealed by the suggestion that while the Dominions should be encouraged to locate an agent in London, Britain should station diplomatic agents in the Dominions. Koppel's desire to have the Foreign Office more closely involved appeared in his second recommendation for a department in the Foreign Office that would relieve the Dominions Office of communicating directly with the Dominions on matters of foreign affairs.

Koppel would have recommended even closer association of the Foreign Office with the Dominions had he not doubted that the Dominions lacked sufficient trained staff for dealing with the complexities of foreign policy. He encouraged, therefore, the long-term of recruitment and training of staff in the Dominions to handle foreign affairs. He advocated using British diplomatic agents in the Dominions to assist in this project.⁶⁵

Koppel's recommendations were double-edged. Strikingly similar to British attempts regarding imperial naval matters prior to the First World War, his proposals to increase consultation with the Dominions also could be interpreted as enhancing their autonomy. Direct communications between the Foreign Office and the Dominions would no doubt have improved consultation, but they would also have placed the Dominions

more in the category of foreign countries in their relations with Britain. It was this implication that drew the sharpest reaction in the Foreign Office.

The diversity of responses from the Foreign Office reflected the conflict which raged within the Foreign Office, especially over the various interpretations of the current status of imperial relations. Controversy was also stimulated by the mixed signals being sent by the Dominions. 'Here at once,' wrote one official,

we come up against the difficulty that nobody really knows where we are, or what we want. Each Dominion wants something a little different from the others, and any one Dominion wants different things at different times. Here at home we are almost equally at sea. Hardly two opinions coincide; the only common denominator is the feeling that all is not well and that something has to be done.⁶⁶

The responses, as could be anticipated, ranged from one extreme of trying to deny that unity was seriously threatened to the other extreme of accepting it as natural that imperial unity was disintegrating. The latter was closer to the truth. In the middle, the majority agreed that something had to be done, but no consensus emerged. Some officials supported more Casey-style appointments, others rejected this as placing an unreasonable strain on the Foreign Secretary, or attributed Casey's success to the man who was 'one in ten thousand'.⁶⁷ Few backed Koppel's recommendation for a separate department within the Foreign Office and only one believed the 'most important link in the chain' was for Britain to appoint a representative in the Dominions.⁶⁸ Most officials seemed anxious that relations with Dominions should not be elevated to the level of foreign countries. This preference meant that

most favoured the Dominions broadening the role of their High Commissioners. The inability to decide a course of action caused William Tyrrell, the Permanent Under-Secretary, to establish a small committee of inquiry. The committee's recommendations, which appeared at the end of April, continued to assign the onus of initiative to the Dominions. It rejected the establishment of a new department, but was willing to create a 'nucleus' in the Foreign Office to liaise with the Dominions which, in time, might be expanded. The committee opposed appointing a British representative to the Dominions. It might be the 'logical corollary' to Dominion representatives in Britain, but it seemed best to wait until the matter was initiated by the Dominions before considering it. The committee's preferred solution, in spite of the perceptive comments of Koppel, was to persuade the Dominions to expand the roles of their High Commissioners to include political duties.⁶⁹ With Chamberlain backing the findings of the report, the Foreign Office once again seemed out of step with reality, believing that the Dominions could be convinced to utilise their High Commissioners more fully - a scheme that King had already rejected.

Within this realm of delusion, there were signs of a growing school of thought in the Foreign Office that the key rested with that office's control of information on international affairs. One official, who thought it unrealistic to scheme for formal unity at this late juncture, especially considering the sentiment in Canada and in South Africa, believed that the Foreign Office was overlooking the one strong card it possessed: information. He observed that the Dominions, while they possessed areas of special interest

and knowledge, such as the United States in the case of Canada, were inadequately equipped beyond these narrow fields. Recognising that the ultimate goal of the British Government was to ensure that the Dominions stood with Britain in time of war, the official felt that the best method was to win the Dominions over, 'not by passing resolutions at Imperial conferences, nor by attempting the application of cut-and-dried rules. It can only be done by preserving the community of interest. For that, frank and full consultation and consequently the free supply of information are vital.'⁷⁰ The concept was one to which the Foreign Office would resort to in the future, but it took fully two years until this became the prevailing view. For the moment, the Foreign Office was comfortable in approaching, with the support of the Dominions Office, the Imperial Conference set for the autumn of 1926 with the scheme of utilising the High Commissioners for improved consultation.

Imperial Conference of 1926

The outcome of the Imperial Conference of 1926 offered little comfort to those who hoped to reverse the onslaught on imperial diplomatic unity. The hope that the Dominions would be party to the Locarno treaties was not realised. Worse still for supporters of unity, the conference passed a resolution which formally acknowledged the Dominions as 'autonomous Countries within the British Empire, equal in status' to Britain.⁷¹

It is not the intention of this study to examine in detail the discussions regarding foreign policy and the formal acknowledgement of Dominion equality, as this has been already

dealt with in several competent studies.⁷² The issue which, for this study, requires further attention concerns the role of Mackenzie King. In 1926, in contrast to his assertive manner at the Imperial Conference of 1923, King was outwardly passive. Plagued by a cold, he seemed to have become complacent. Worse still, in comparison with the determination of General Hertzog, Prime Minister of South Africa, and W.T. Cosgrave, President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State, King seemed to have lost his appetite for a fight, as it fell to these two men to launch an attack demanding a recognition of parity with Britain. In order to defuse and repel this attack, the matter was passed to a sub-committee whose membership comprised Dominion Prime Ministers and chairman, Lord Balfour. It was in this committee, as Hertzog, supported by Cosgrave, launched his determined assault on unity, that King was seen as the honest broker between British interests and those of South Africa and the Irish Free State. Without question, King was a prime force in aiding the passage of Balfour's 'high-sounding' but ambiguous definition of imperial relations.⁷³

If one accepts the interpretation that the Imperial Conference of 1926 marked the end of all attempts at formal diplomatic imperial unity, and that the Statute of Westminster was merely a more elaborate endorsement of events at the conference, then it seems that by 1926 King was no longer an ardent anti-imperialist. He may have been content with matters as they stood. But this assessment collapses under closer examination. Mackenzie King was still working towards complete autonomy for Canada from British foreign commitments. He was doing this in a far less flamboyant fashion than

Hertzog and Cosgrave, but in many respects in a far more effective way.

One comfort that Whitehall could draw from the resolutions at the Imperial Conference was that although imperial unity was discarded behind closed doors, publicly the image of unity persisted as the public statements on Locarno and on the status of the Dominions remained sufficiently ambiguous to sustain the illusion of unity. King, however, at the Imperial Conference of 1926, laid the ground for forcing a public acknowledgement upon Britain which would come in 1928 when Britain was obliged to appoint a High Commissioner to Ottawa. It is frequently treated by historians as a footnote⁷⁴ that King sought and secured restrictions on the role of the Governor General, so that after 1 July 1927, the Canadian Government communicated directly with the British Government, thus bypassing the Governor General. Or that King, moreover, refused to allow his High Commissioner to be employed as a go-between for Canada and Britain. In these two instances, he set the stage for pushing Britain in a direction which left Britain no option but to appoint its own representative in Ottawa. However this appointment might be justified, it visibly marked the end of imperial unity. Britain now had to appoint someone who was, to all intents and purposes, an ambassador in Ottawa, just as if Canada was a 'foreign' country.

1. PRO, FO 800/256/69-70, Chamberlain to Amery, 14 November 1924.

2. PRO, FO 371/10565, W9981/4972/50, memorandum by Villiers, 12 November 1924.

3. PRO, FO 800/256/200-202, Chamberlain to Amery, 25 November 1924.

4. PRO, FO 371/10565, W10660/4972/50, Amery to the Governors General of the Dominions, 5 December 1924.

5. PRO, CO 532/274/58634, Byng to Amery, 13 December 1924.

6. PRO, FO 371/10565, W10990/4972/50, only two officials commented and even then it was non-committal.

7. PRO, CO 532/274/58634, 'Canadian Proposal of Direct Communications between Department of External Affairs and Foreign Office', memorandum by A. Chamberlain, 20 December 1924.

8. PRO, CO 532/274/58634, minute by Dixon, 12 January 1925, on the meeting of the joint committee.

9. D. Dutton, Austen Chamberlain: Gentleman in Politics, Bolton, 1985, pp. 1-2. Dutton noted that Austen Chamberlain's career 'remains an historical and historiographical backwater' compared to his father's, Joseph, and his step-brother's, Neville.

10. D. Dutton gives an excellent summary of the harsh manner in which Austen Chamberlain has been treated in comparison to his father. D. Dutton, Austen Chamberlain: Gentleman in Politics, pp. 1-10. Other negative historical views include: P. Rowland, The Last Liberal Government: The Promised Land 1905-1910, London, 1968, p. 50. Rowland described Chamberlain as one who suffered 'from being the over-groomed offspring of an outstanding personality.'; Harold Macmillan wrote that 'Austen was, except in appearance, very unlike his father.' H. Macmillan, The Past Masters, London, 1975, p. 128.

11. Keith Robbins, ed., The Blackwell Biographical Dictionary of British Political Life in the Twentieth Century, Oxford, 1990. Entry on Austen Chamberlain by David Dutton, pp. 89-92.

12. Harold Wilson, The Imperial Policy of Sir Robert Borden, Florida, 1966, pp. 28-29. Reference taken from the National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Perley Papers, folder 6, G. Perley to Borden, 14 August 1914.

13. NAC, Perley Papers, vol. 10, ff. 308A-308D, Perley to Borden, 12 December 1917; vol. 11, f. 317, Borden to Perley, 18 January 1918.

14. NAC, King Diaries, 13 October 1922. Milner conveyed his message in a letter carried by the retiring Perley on his return to Ottawa.

15. PRO, FO 372/2015, T3802/3128/350, minute by H.F. Adam, 7 April 1923.

16. PRO, FO 372/2015, T4801/3128/350, minute by G. Mounsey, 3 May 1923.

17. John Barnes and David Nicholson, eds., The Leo Amery Diaries, vol. 1, 1896-1929, London, 1980, 14 November 1924, p. 391.

18. NAC, King Papers, C2267, ff. 87454-7, P. Larkin to King, 20 November 1924.

19. Ibid., 18 November 1924, p. 392.

20. The Times, 12 November 1924.

21. University of Birmingham, Central Library, Austen Chamberlain Papers, (hereafter Chamberlain Papers), AC 51/169, P. Kerr to Chamberlain, 18 November 1924.

22. PRO, FO 800/256/200-202, Chamberlain to Amery, 25 November 1924.

23. NAC, King Papers, C2267, ff. 87454-7, Larkin to King, 20 November 1924.

24. NAC, King Diaries, 19 November 1924.

25. NAC, King Diaries, 22 November 1924.

26. NAC, King Diaries, 23 November 1924, 12 December 1924; NAC, King Papers, C2267, f. 87459, undated memorandum by O.D. Skelton on Larkin's latter of 20 November 1924.

27. NAC, King Papers, C2267, ff. 87559-61, King to Larkin, 12 December 1924.

28. NAC, King Diaries, 13 December 1924.

29. NAC, King Papers, C2267, ff. 87661-4, Larkin to King, 30 December 1924.

30. PRO, CO 532/274/58634, Byng to Amery, 13 December 1924.

31. PRO, CO 532/274/58634, draft reply to King prepared by inter-departmental committee of Foreign Office and Colonial Office, January 1925.

32. John Hilliker, Canada's Department of External Affairs, vol. 1: The Early Years, 1909-1946, p. 15, reference Canada: House of Commons Debate, 29 April 1880, p. 1859.

33. Hilliker, Canada's Department of External Affairs, vol. 1, pp. 18-19.

34. Ibid., p. 19.

35. Ibid., p. 15. Galt remained in London until only 1883.

36. Ibid., pp. 16-17. Tupper succeeded Galt and remained in London until 1896.

37. Ibid., pp 21-23; p. 61.

38. Ibid., p. 61; p. 71.

39. Ibid., p. 70.

40. Ibid., p. 61.

41. NAC, King Papers, C2267, ff. 87661-4, Larkin to King, 30 December 1924.

42. NAC, King Papers, C2267, ff. 87582-84, Larkin to King, 17 December 1924.

43. NAC, King Papers, C2255, ff. 75235-57, King to Larkin, 10 July 1923. King apologised for his infrequent correspondence and then limited his letter to matters of trade and administration.

44. NAC, King Diaries, 25 August 1924.

45. Correlli Barnett, The Collapse of British Power, Gloucester, reprinted 1987, pp. 319-331.

46. Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, p. 247.

47. Chamberlain Papers, AC 51/44, R. Cecil to Chamberlain, undated, circa November 1924.

48. Chamberlain Papers, AC 52/42, Chamberlain to Amery, 10 July 1925.

49. Chamberlain Papers, AC 52/32, S.M. Bruce to Amery, 6 May 1925.

50. Chamberlain Papers, AC 52/38, Chamberlain to Amery, 19 June 1925.

51. Chamberlain Papers, AC 52/240, Eyre Crowe to Chamberlain, 12 March 1925.

52. NAC, King Diaries, 1 December 1925.

53. University Library, (Cambridge), Baldwin Papers, (hereafter Baldwin Papers), vol. 96, ff. 34-37, J. Hertzog to Amery, 18 December 1925.

54. NAC, Borden Papers, C4428, ff. 148239-40, Borden to Chamberlain, 30 January 1926.

55. Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, Lothian Papers, (hereafter Lothian Papers), GD 40/17/221, Christie to Kerr, 8 November 1925.

56. Lloyd George Papers, G/12/5/12, Kerr to Lloyd George, 13 November 1925.

57. Chamberlain Papers, AC 52/539, Chamberlain to P. Kerr, 6 April 1925.

58. PRO, DO 35/12/D2749, C. Howard Smith, Foreign Office to E.J. Harding, Colonial Office, 10 March 1926.

59. Chamberlain Papers, AC 52/240, Eyre Crowe to Chamberlain, 12 March 1925, describing sentiment at a meeting on the subject of the military pact.

60. PRO, DO 117/9, Bruce to Casey, undated, but sent around beginning of March as the letter was forwarded to the Dominions Office, 10 March 1926.

61. PRO, DO 117/9, C.T. Davis, Dominions Office to W. Tyrrell, Foreign Office, 5 April 1926.

62. PRO, DO 117/9, V. Wellesley, Foreign Office to C.T. Davis, Dominions Office, 16 April 1926.

63. PRO, FO 372/2197/T5885, 'Consultation and Communication of Information to the British Dominions on Foreign Policy', prepared by Percy Koppel, 16 January 1926.

64. PRO, FO 372/2197, T5885/5885/384, minute by C.J.B. Hurst, 22 January 1926.

65. Ibid., 'Memorandum on Consultation with and Communication to the British Dominions on Foreign Policy', by Percy Koppel, 16 January 1926.

66. Ibid., minute by R.H. Campbell, undated but circa end of January 1926.

67. Ibid., minute by Campbell, undated but circa end of January 1926.

68. Ibid., minute by M. Lampson, 1 February 1926.

69. PRO, FO 372/2197, T5886/5885/384, report of inter-committee on consultation with the Dominions, 21 April 1926.

70. PRO, FO 372/2197, T5885/5885/384, minute by Campbell, undated but circa end of January 1926.

71. Cmd. 2768, p. 14.

72. Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience, pp. 228-236; Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 2, pp. 85-89; Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, pp. 248-277.

73. Barnett, The Collapse of British Power, p. 200.

74. Barnett, The Collapse of British Power, pp. 198-208. Barnett does not mention the matter of communications at all; Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience, p. 230; Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 2, p. 87.

CHAPTER 7:

REDEFINING THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL

In the 1920s, the greatest visible symbol of the imperial relationship between Canada and Britain was the Governor General of Canada. This link was both symbolic but practical. Until the changes which occurred later in the 1920s, the Governor General remained empowered as an active representative of the British Government rather than a passive representative of the Crown. Although this shift in responsibility was formalised at the Imperial Conference of 1926, the transition evolved gradually through the 1920s in step with the growth of Canadian nationalism. Two key areas of transition in the Governor's General functions were in the process of selecting a candidate for the post and communications with Britain. Canada gained increasing influence in the selection process throughout the 1920s, and this contributed to the changing responsibilities of the Governor General. Adjustments in the Governor General's type and method of communications with Britain were fundamental in redefining the duties of the Governor General. The Canadian Government was one contributor to securing changes. The Governors General, however, were also an important factor in bringing about changes in the role of the Governor General. Their actions in redefining the role of the Governor General in communications with Britain established the base for Mackenzie King to implement formal restrictions on the post of Governor General in 1926.

The Continuation of Tradition: 1867-1916

Until the First World War, the Governor General's involvement in Canadian external affairs and as an intermediary between the Canadian and British Governments had not changed significantly in decades. Indeed, many of the responsibilities of the office had remained intact from pre-Confederation days in the Government of the United Province of Canada.

In the United Province of Canada, the Governor General was central to the conduct of external affairs. It fell within his jurisdiction to decide whether matters would be handled locally or be referred to London. He retained this discretionary power after the Confederation of 1867. He also retained his role as conduit of correspondence between Canada and Britain, and between Canada and the British Ambassador in Washington. One change from the pre-Confederation days was that the person who assumed charge of the correspondence was a member of the personal staff of the Governor General and not a civil servant. It was symbolic of the Governor General's pivotal position in the conduct of Canada's external affairs that his offices were in the East Block of the Canadian Parliament Buildings. The Governor General retained these offices until 1942.

Confederation eclipsed the role of the Governor General in domestic matters but not in external affairs. The installation of the transatlantic cable in 1865, limited the Governor General more than Confederation did. The new cable service meant speedier communications between the British and Canadian Governments. Faster communications restricted the Governor General's personal initiative in matters that had

been possible when a time delay occurred in seeking or receiving British advice. Even the appointment of a Canadian High Commissioner to London in 1880 did little to restrict the function of the Governor General in communicating with the British Government, since all instructions from the Canadian Government to its High Commissioner were submitted to the Governor General, who sent a copy to the Colonial Office. Also, the Governor General insisted on seeing copies of all correspondence with the High Commissioner. Thus it remained from Confederation until the reforms of the 1920s that the official mechanism of communication to Britain for the Canadian Government was through the Governor General, who in turn relayed communications to the Colonial Office which acted as the clearing house for the British Government. Even the establishment of the Canadian Department of External Affairs in 1909 did not impede this channel of communication. In the bill forming the new department, however, lay the seeds which would undermine and, in time, limit the role of the Governor General.

On 4 March 1909, Charles Murphy, the Secretary of State, presented a bill to the Canadian House of Commons proposing the creation of a Department of External Affairs. The new department was intended primarily to improve the efficiency of the government. It was not intended to create a Foreign Office in Canada, although the bill contained terms which allowed for such expansion when it became appropriate. It was these terms, particularly those found in the third clause, which led to an attack by the then Governor General, Lord Grey.

The third clause allowed the Secretary of State to 'have the conduct of all official communications between the government of Canada and the government of any other country'. Grey regarded this as an encroachment on the powers of the Governor General since it was Governor General's job to communicate with Britain. Grey obtained from the Canadian Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, what he believed was an agreement that 'conduct' would be replaced by 'care'. This was not done as Laurier made no efforts publicly to change the phrasing, so that the bill passed both the House of Commons and the Senate with clause three intact. Even after the passage of the bill, practice left the Governor General involved in the conduct of foreign affairs for several years to come. Nevertheless the failure of Grey to have the clause changed facilitated the evolution of the Department of External Affairs into the Canadian equivalent of the Foreign Office.

The first significant changes to limit, and then abolish, the active role of the Governor General in Canada's conduct of foreign affairs came during the First World War as a result, not of specific legislation, but of the increased personal contact of Sir Robert Borden with British politicians and officials. The strain of the war years meant that Borden spent a total of thirteen months overseas between 1915 and 1919. The increased presence of the Canadian Prime Minister diminished the influence of the Governor General. This decline was intensified not only by the new style of the Canadian Prime Minister, who took the lead in communicating with Britain, but also with the growing sense of Canadian autonomy. Since no Governor General after Lord Grey sought to

defend the duties of the office, the erosion of the powers of the Governor General gained momentum, and all efforts employed to halt it were ineffectual.¹

Devonshire: Unconscious Innovator

When the ninth Duke of Devonshire² arrived in Canada in 1916 to serve as Governor General there was nothing to suggest that during his term the process for critical changes in the role of the Governor General in Canada would begin. Devonshire had extensive Parliamentary experience, having served as a Liberal Unionist M.P., 1891-1908, a Financial Secretary to the Treasury, 1903-05 and Civil Lord of the Admiralty, 1915-16. Although Devonshire was relatively young, in his late forties, he did not bring much vigour or interest to his new post. Outwardly, Devonshire's term was uneventful. His successor in office, Lord Byng, regarded Devonshire as having made 'no impression, save opening one Stock fare [sic].'³ This was an accurate assessment of Devonshire's public image, but what Byng could not see fully was that during his predecessor's term imperceptible changes occurred which reshaped the responsibilities of the Governor Generalship.

Devonshire's term marked the end of many functions of the office. He was the last Governor General to be appointed on the sole advice of the British Prime Minister. His appointment was one of the last occasions when nobody 'challenged the sovereignty of the British Crown and the Parliament over the Empire.'⁴ Under this form of selection the assumption was made that Devonshire would not only be the medium of communication between the Canadian and British

Governments, but would watch over the interests of the British Government and keep it informed of vital developments. It was in this aspect, of keeping the British Government informed of developments in Canada, that first indicated a change in the role of the Governor General.

Communicating with Whitehall:

Even after Confederation, one way the Governor General stayed active in the affairs of the Dominion was in being the channel for the communications between Britain and Canada. He was, moreover, regarded not only as representative of the Crown, but more importantly, a representative of the British Government. In theory he was the eyes, ears and defender of the interests of the British Government. In this capacity he was expected to be in communication with the British Government, informing it of Canadian activities and soliciting British advice. These duties conjured up images of colonial days when Britain interfered in Canada's domestic affairs. But in practice, however, this was not the case, unless the King-Byng affair of 1926 is explained in a one-sided manner. From that point of view, it might be concluded that Britain was still intervening in internal matters as late as 1926.

During the constitutional crisis of 1926, Mackenzie King accused Lord Byng, the Governor General, of seeking advice from the British Government on appropriate action about handling the Canadian parliamentary crisis created by the problems with King's minority government. King's inference was that Byng was no more than a puppet of the British Government, or worse still, a spy, who compromised the autonomy of Canada. Indeed, one of the myths which has grown

up around Byng's Governor Generalship suggests that he was in constant private contact with the British Government. Nothing could be further from the truth. Byng continued a pattern which had grown up in Devonshire's time, that the Governor General was merely the postman who rarely, if ever, forwarded information of his own accord to Whitehall. The difference between Devonshire and Byng was that Byng had made a conscious decision not to provide Britain with background information about the official communications sent. Devonshire followed this path more out of apathy than a conscious act. There was, in fact, an attempt during Devonshire's term to re-assert the Governor General's duty to keep the Colonial Secretary privately informed.

Efforts to reinstate private correspondence between the Canadian Governor General and the Colonial Secretary occurred in 1917 at the instigation of the then Colonial Secretary, Walter Long. Writing to Devonshire he noted:

I am very glad to find that Chamberlain, who originated the correspondence between Governors General and the Secretary of State, took the same view, so that I have the very best authority for the line which I am taking. I shall write quite frankly to you about everything in your Dominion or here, and I hope you will do the same by me, relying upon the fact that unless either of us desire for some special reason to show the letter or a portion of it to others, it will be for ourselves alone.⁵

When Lord Milner took over as Colonial Secretary in 1919 he received a private letter from Devonshire enquiring if this practice of private correspondence was to continue. The Colonial Secretary agreed that it should.⁶

Good intentions by both Devonshire and Milner were not enough to maintain private correspondence. Devonshire, more

than Milner, pursued the practice, initially with great enthusiasm. During 1919, however, the Governor General wrote privately to Milner only three times. In 1920, just as the frequency dwindled, so too did the contents, and Devonshire wrote privately only once. Devonshire's exertions were poor, but they were more impressive than those of Milner.⁷ After July 1920, these letters ceased. The practice was not resumed when Byng succeeded Devonshire. In his final days as Governor General, Devonshire acted as a mere postman between the British and Canadian Governments.

Devonshire was prepared to keep Whitehall unofficially informed of events, but unintentionally curtailed information to the Colonial Office, primarily it seems because his energy could not sustain it. Devonshire's willingness to forward private information was known to Borden, who wrote with annoyance at a later date that during his premiership he was aware that 'from time to time that reports were sent by the Governor General to the Colonial Office which were not submitted to me'.⁸ Byng followed in Devonshire's footsteps with respect to communications.

Byng was a very different Governor General from Devonshire. He did not have a background in Parliamentary affairs, but was a professional soldier who had had an impressive career of successful commands which included the Canadian Corps, 1916-17. Although he was five years Devonshire's senior, he brought a vigour and enthusiasm which outpaced his predecessor. Byng was someone who thought constantly about his actions and their ramifications. Thus, although he followed his predecessor's example on communications, unlike Devonshire, he made a conscious

decision not to send private reports to the Colonial Office. It is ironic therefore that of the two men, Byng should have been the one cast as a British informant.

King levelled the accusation of informant for the British Government against Byng during the Canadian election of 1926, and later at the Imperial Conference of 1926. This accusation has been endorsed to an extent in at least one study⁹, which insinuates that Byng transacted a great deal of secret communications with the Colonial Office and then the Dominions Office. A corollary of the accusation is that Byng not only compromised the private affairs of the Canadian Government, but misrepresented Canadian opinions to the British Government. The customary example is Byng's private note regarding Canada and ratification of the Lausanne Treaty, when Byng did cause some confusion concerning the Canadian position. But it is highly questionable, as was explained in Chapter Five, how far this evidence can be stretched to suggest that Byng undermined the Canadian Government or that he was a secret informant. The action, moreover, was highly out of character for Byng and is not in itself enough to sustain a charge which collapses under close scrutiny. Whether examining British or Canadian documents, Byng's communications with Britain are beyond reproach.

Byng operated on the principle that he was a representative of the Crown and communicated privately only with the British monarch. Canadian and British documentation attest to the fact that Byng remained true to his conviction. Entries in Mackenzie King's diary, from 1921 until the constitutional crisis, reveal Byng's repetitive assertion that he was not in private communication with the British

Government and chose to send his reports only to the King. This private correspondence, moreover, was never passed to the Colonial Office by the King. It was a source of grievance in Whitehall, particularly with Amery, that Byng did not communicate privately with the Colonial Office, and later the Dominions Office, in order to keep them informed of events in Canada, especially since Amery was aware of Byng's communications with His Majesty. Amery attributed this unfortunate state of affairs to the failure to explain the Governor General's role to Byng upon taking office. Amery tried to convince himself that Byng's inclination to act as a viceregal postman was reversible and he was determined that Byng's successor would know that he was expected to keep the Dominions Office informed of Canadian developments, in order to assist Whitehall anticipate future rumblings from Canada. Amery's determination was never realised; among the resolutions at the Imperial Conference of 1926 was one which restricted the Governor General's communications with the British Government by establishing a new channel between Britain and the Dominions. Under the new arrangements, which came into effect in 1 July 1927, the Governor General was no longer the conduit of communications. King believed that he had pressed for this alteration and had achieved something entirely new in that the Governor General would now communicate with the British Government only under the direction of his Canadian ministers. King may have been correct in claiming credit for this change in the formal sense, but the arrangement developed in practice as a result of the passive action of Devonshire, and then the deliberate action of Byng. Consequently, Byng was chiefly responsible

for putting into practice the notion that the Governor General was a representative of the monarch, without links or responsibilities to the British Government, and thus furthering the concept that the monarch was the monarch of Canada and the monarch's advisers, or, in practice the Governor General's advisers, were his Canadian advisers.

The British Government recognised that Byng kept it ill-informed of Canadian affairs. The British Government, however, did little to seek information about Canadian affairs through other means. Throughout most of the 1920s, Whitehall's knowledge of Canadian affairs came primarily from The Times' reports from Canada and occasionally from debates in the Canadian House of Commons as recorded in Hansard. These methods of gathering information did not appear to concern Whitehall in the 1920s. The inadequacies of these methods, however, became apparent when the first British High Commissioner to Canada assumed his post in 1928. The new British High Commissioner sent to the British Government reports whose contents surpassed in detail those found in either The Times or Canadian Hansard. From 1921 to 1921, therefore, the combination of Lord Byng's actions as Governor General and Britain's failure to respond effectively meant that the Britain's knowledge of Canadian affairs was limited.

Selection of the Governor General

One reason for considering the Governor General as a representative of the British Government derived from the manner in which the appointment was made. Up to and including Devonshire, the appointments remained the exclusive right of

the British Government. Erosion of this exclusive hold began with the selection of a successor for Devonshire. Changes in the selection process of the Canadian Governor General occurred steadily but subtly through the 1920s. A decision in the first instance that belonged exclusively to Britain, as in the case the Duke of Devonshire, became the outright choice of the Canadian Government in 1926, with the appointment of Lord Willingdon. This transition was both symbolic and realistic in indicating further recognition of Canada's independent stature.

The trend in the 1920s of Canada's growing and then decisive voice in the selection of the Governors General strengthened the concept that this was an appointment at the pleasure of the Canadian Government. This undermined the idea that the Governor General was a representative of the British Government and made him the Crown's representative only. It was in communicating only with the Crown that the riddle surrounding the unity of the Crown was partially resolved. With the Governor General emerging clearly as a choice of the Canadian Government, and his sole advisers being Canadian, the concept was advanced that he was a representative of the Canadian, not the British monarch, and that the monarch was a divisible entity.

The shift in the selection process occurred over ten years. In 1916, the process was still firmly in the grip of the British Government. Robert Borden tried to boast, retrospectively, that he had seriously considered appointing Sir Wilfrid Laurier to the Governor Generalship in 1916 and was only dissuaded when upon reflection he decided that 'it would be undesirable to select a public man while actually

engaged in political activities.¹⁰ Borden's boast rings hollow. The appointment of a candidate who was the exclusive choice of the Canadian Government, and who, moreover, was a Canadian, seems unlikely to have appealed to the British even in the most ideal circumstances since it would have suggested recognition of an imperial relationship which had not yet begun to evolve. After all, in 1916, Herbert Asquith, with his proven refusal to acknowledge any advancement in the status of the Dominions, was still Prime Minister. Even if his successor David Lloyd George, who was the catalyst in beginning a re-examination of the imperial relationship, had then been in office, the appointment of Laurier or any Canadian was unlikely. Even in 1919 Lloyd George clung to tradition when he stated that he would not approve the appointment of a non-British resident to the post of Governor General of a Dominion, because this 'constituted almost the last remaining tie between the Dominions and the Mother Country.'¹¹ So it happened that Devonshire became the last of a certain breed of Governors General: men appointed by the British Government to be the representative of the Crown and to serve as the liaison between Britain and Canada and ensure that the views of the British Government were known.

Indications that some officials in Whitehall were willing to acknowledge changes in the Governor's General role came from the Colonial Secretary. In 1919, Lord Milner decided that a new direction must be taken in choosing Governors General for the Dominions. Jan Christian Smuts, the Prime Minister of South Africa, sparked the debate with his letter to Milner declaring that no appointment should be made without soliciting the opinion of the Dominion Government. Smuts was

convinced that the time had come for the appointment of local men to the position. The Colonial Secretary termed Smuts' suggestion regarding local men in the post as a 'mistake', but he did believe that the Dominion Government should be consulted. In further recognition of the growing stature of the Dominions, Milner wanted negotiations between Britain and the Dominions to be conducted at a higher governmental level, ideally Prime Minister to Prime Minister. 'As regards the Governor General,' wrote Milner to Lloyd George, 'I believe - at any rate, it ought to be, a Cabinet appointment, not a Colonial Office appointment.' He stressed that inter-governmental consultation was essential at every stage during the process, or better still, that the Prime Ministers settled the issue between themselves. Milner then opened the way to further changes in the selection process by supporting the right of the Dominion to suggest persons for consideration. At the very least the appointment should not be made without the sanction of the Dominion concerned. This suggestion undermined the exclusive control the British Government had previously possessed, but Milner did not relinquish total control since any appointment would still require the sanction of the British Cabinet. Also, Milner's suggestions implied that while the Dominion could suggest a name or two, most of the potential contenders for the post would be chosen by Britain.¹²

Lloyd George was reluctant to proceed in this new direction. He never became directly involved in the process. In 1921, Lloyd George left the appointment of a replacement for Devonshire in the hands of the Colonial Office. Milner, although opposed to his office having to make a selection,

proceeded alone in making the appointment of a new Canadian Governor General. In 1926, however, Stanley Baldwin, now the British Prime Minister, became involved in choosing a new Canadian Governor General. Baldwin brought the selection process even further along by consulting directly with the Canadian Prime Minister.

Since the Colonial Secretary acted on his own initiative, it is difficult to identify the various names he had under consideration, or if indeed Byng was his first choice¹³. Byng must have ranked high at the outset as Milner had brought the matter up with him early in 1920. Once Byng indicated his willingness to accept the post, Milner made inquiries only to discover a disinclination in Canada to have a military man as Governor General. Milner decided, on the basis of these soundings, not to pursue the appointment of Byng. When Winston Churchill replaced Milner as Colonial Secretary in January 1921, he agreed with Milner's strategy not to proceed with Byng's candidature. Even so, he kept Byng's name on the list of potential candidates which he sent to Arthur Meighen, the Canadian Prime Minister, in March 1921. Churchill explained that he knew of the feeling against having a military man such as Byng and accepted this view. Of the other candidates, the Colonial Secretary passed on his comments and made it clear that the decision rested with Meighen.¹⁴ By June, Meighen had reversed his stance on Byng and decided that he would be appropriate.¹⁵ Churchill was pleased to waive his earlier reservations and the appointment went forward.¹⁶

The reluctance of the Colonial Secretaries, first Milner and then Churchill, to appoint Byng because of the suspected

ill-feeling toward military men in Canadian circles reveals a new change in the selection process. It was significant what weight the views of the Dominion now carried. No longer was the British Government willing to appoint a Governor General without the approval of the Dominion concerned. Another aspect revealed during the selection of Byng was Milner's fear, felt as early as 1919, that Canada would press for a local man to be appointed, or at least to have a much stronger voice in the selection process.¹⁷ These fears, Churchill was delighted to discover, were groundless. An editorial in the Toronto Globe¹⁸ and a speech by Sir James Lougheed in the Canadian Senate¹⁹, both early in 1921, conveyed the impression that Canadians accepted that the choice of their Governor General remained a British prerogative. The caution which the Colonial Office exercised in the appointment of Lord Byng, without prompting from Canada, is impressive. British ministers, largely due to Milner, were yielding more power to Canada in the selection of a Governor General without being subjected to pressure. This initiative set the stage whereby Canada's control over the process in 1926 seemed an almost natural, frictionless progression.

Choosing Byng's successor

Unlike previous selection processes, the process of selecting Byng's successor, Lord Willingdon, is extremely well documented. The appointment of Willingdon, although it was not obvious to the Canadians at the time, established the precedent that the Canadian Government dictated who would be appointed. Initially it seemed that the established selection process would be followed, whereby the British submitted a

list of names to the Canadian Government from which it stated a preference.²⁰ Accordingly, Willingdon's name was on the list from which the Canadians selected their preference. The vital difference was that Whitehall had never wished to include Willingdon and only did so because Canada wished Willingdon's name on the list. Britain, furthermore, did its best to dissuade the Canadian Government from selecting him. In the end, the British Government accepted the appointment of Willingdon only because it felt powerless to block the Canadian Government's wishes. Willingdon was the first Governor General who was very much a Canadian appointee.

By the latter part of 1925, once Byng indicated that he would not be willing to extend his term as Mackenzie King desired, both the British and the Canadians began independently to take soundings to find a successor. It was during that summer that Willingdon first emerged as a possible successor. John Buchan, the author and future Governor General of Canada, who had been a friend of King's since their meeting during the Imperial Conference of 1923, wrote that he had heard Lord Willingdon's name mentioned. Buchan, like many others, considered Willingdon 'very pleasant and tactful', but since his experience was in colonial administration, serving as Governor of Bombay, 1913-19, and of Madras, 1919-24, he was 'not very able' and 'had no knowledge of self-governing Dominions.'²¹

Amery began giving consideration to the appointment in November 1925. It was Amery's practice to cultivate various reliable Canadian contacts to give an insight into Canadian opinion. In this instance, it was a conversation with Sir Campbell Stuart, a director of The Times, which assisted

Amery. Stuart predicted that King would remain in office until the following summer and therefore would have the deciding voice in appointing the new Governor General'. Amery resigned himself to this fate and concluded that King was 'determined not to have anyone who has any connexion with the Unionist Party here which would I fear put Sam Hoare out of consideration, his leaning being towards Willingdon or somebody from the Liberal camp.'²² It is interesting that Amery should have the impression that King was so anti-conservative. Amery had hoped to be rid of King, thereby excluding him from the selection of the next Governor General. Amery's desire was not kept from King. In February 1926, Lord Beaverbrook informed King that Amery had been irritated by the Canadian election results of the autumn of 1925 when King held on with a minority government. Amery was distressed because he had wished to secure the new Governor General through Meighen. Beaverbrook, encouraging the already strained relations between King and Amery, played on King's suspicions regarding a British Conservative plot by claiming that Amery possessed the prejudice where 'only a man labelled Conservative anywhere in the Empire can be really safe.'²³

In early February 1926, Amery began the process of compiling a list of candidates which he sent to Baldwin. Again Amery mentioned his hope that an official statement could be avoided 'long enough to give Mackenzie-King [sic] a chance of falling out when he meets Parliament again in six weeks time.' Of the various names put forward, Amery believed that Canada neither wanted nor 'ought to have another soldier.' He concluded that whoever was chosen the person must have 'political experience, with a power of getting

interested in the development of Canada and of inspiring them with confidence in themselves and belief in the Empire.' Amery thus suggested the names of the Duke of York, later George VI, Samuel Hoare, the Marquess of Londonderry and the Marquess of Linlithgow.²⁴ The Dominions Secretary predicted that none of these would be acceptable. 'All the four just mentioned are of course tainted in Mackenzie-King's [sic] eyes by their association with our Party and he will probably try hard to get someone of his persuasion or non-party. The only Liberal of sorts who is possible for the job is Willingdon who would love it and do it tolerably well...'.²⁵

Within a few days of Amery's letter, Baldwin received a note from King requesting a list of potential candidates in order to start the 'necessary machinery in motion' for appointing a new Governor General. King felt the need to lay the ground rules for the appointment. 'It has,' wrote King, 'become pretty generally accepted that any appointment should have the cordial approval of both governments and, should a difference of view arise, that regard should be had for the wishes of the government of Canada.'²⁶ Amery received Baldwin's permission to compose a response to King. Amery considered it essential to phrase the reply in such a way as 'to enable Mr. Mackenzie-King the pleasure of thinking that he is initiating the arrangements necessary for the appointment of a successor to Lord Byng.'²⁷ Amery's comforting assumption that he was taking the lead in the matter was short-lived. He could not have known that King had been contemplating the matter regularly since December or that in the end the matter would be settled between Baldwin and King to the exclusion of the Dominions Secretary.

In mid-December 1925, King discussed this matter with Byng. Conversation focused both on traits desired and on specific names. The two men were not of like mind. While Byng approved of Lord Cromer, the Lord Chamberlain, King did not. Where King favoured John Buchan, Byng dismissed him as being from the 'wrong social set'. This stimulated King's ever-present apprehensions and led him to observe: 'there was a danger of government House becoming [sic] to be regarded as a preserve for Tory social set'. This suspicion was enhanced when King suggested Edward, Viscount Grey of Fallodon, the Liberal statesman who served as Foreign Secretary from 1905 to 1916, only to have Byng respond that the 'other side' might not approve. King leapt to the conclusion that the priority was obviously to pick someone 'to suit the Tories'. The name of Willingdon did come up in this early conversation and was the only one on which the two men agreed; even if Byng was lukewarm, he regarded Willingdon at least as having diplomatic experience. In his diary, King also recorded that Byng believed there should be no royalty, no Canadian and no military man. King felt it crucial that the person selected should have parliamentary experience and knowledge of the British Constitution. He disagreed with Byng's interpretation that a Governor General was an umpire and instead perceived it as a more limited role. King believed Byng failed to understand that the House of Commons governed and Byng's role was 'to give expression only to its will as expressed in constitutional way.'²⁸

Discussion between Byng and King resumed in January 1926. It continued to focus around Buchan, Willingdon and Cromer as candidates.²⁹ Cromer, although mentioned, was by and large

dismissed by this time, leaving Willingdon and Buchan. Willingdon was the focus of consideration, which was due in part to his presence in Ottawa while on a private trip with his wife. With Buchan the only other one discussed, Willingdon was no doubt favoured by Byng because at least he possessed the social background that Byng considered so essential. King noted with satisfaction that Byng accepted King's choice of Willingdon 'of his own volition'.³⁰

After a discussion in February, even after a few more names were contemplated, Willingdon remained the favourite. Byng then encouraged King to write to Baldwin for a list of candidates,³¹ a suggestion very much in keeping with King's own opinion. This action reveals King's own awareness of his destiny to forge ahead in the imperial relationship with Britain. He believed he was establishing a precedent by requesting Whitehall's list of candidates,³² though this had already been established at the time of Byng's appointment. King failed, however, to realise that he was breaking new ground by negotiating directly with Baldwin. It fulfilled Milner's desire from 1919 that selection of a Governor General occur at the Prime Ministerial level establishing imperial relations between peers, instead of being left, as previously in the hands of the Colonial Office or the Dominions Office.

When King's request was received in London, a list of names had still not been finalised nor had the appointment procedure. After discussion with George V, Amery notified Baldwin that the monarch felt it best to submit four or five names to King and wait for a response before sounding out the individuals concerned. Baldwin was not keen to include Linlithgow's name and Amery inquired whether Londonderry's or

Willingdon's might be added.³³ In the correspondence exchanged between Buckingham Palace and Downing Street, Willingdon's name was not in the original list from Downing Street.³⁴ Willingdon was added only after George V, hearing that the Canadians wanted Willingdon, suggested that Baldwin should consider including Willingdon on the list.³⁵

Baldwin responded to King's inquiry by the end of March. It was at this juncture that Amery was excluded from the process. Baldwin forwarded to King four names, one of which was Willingdon's, and commented on each, making it clear that Willingdon was included only because the Canadian government had mentioned him. Baldwin remarked that Willingdon was 'neither in general ability, knowledge of affairs, nor in the appeal which he would make to the public ... quite in the same class as the others whom I have mentioned.'³⁶

Unaware that decisions were being made without him, Amery wrote to Baldwin inquiring if a response had yet been sent to Canada. If it had not gone, then Amery was anxious to plead that at all costs Willingdon not be included on the list. 'Quite apart from any Party considerations he [Willingdon] is, I think, definitely inferior to what is required for Canada. But Mackenzie-King [sic] is so susceptible to flattery and in his heart is so indifferent to the importance of having a good Governor General that I do not know what influence Lady Willingdon may not have had over him during her recent visit to Ottawa.' Amery hoped that if Baldwin had felt it necessary to include Willingdon, that he expressed disapproval in his letter so that Whitehall was able 'to negotiate still further if by any chance Mackenzie-King asked for him'.³⁷ Even at this stage Amery failed to discover that he had been excluded

from the appointment process. In fact on 16 April 1926 King wrote to Baldwin that he had decided on Willingdon. Baldwin went ahead with the necessary arrangements, such as consulting with the King. As these arrangements were being made, Amery pursued the rumour that King wanted Buchan and sent a letter to Baldwin arguing against the appointment.³⁸ So complete was Amery's exclusion from the process that it was only during his casual conversation with the King's private secretary, Lord Stamfordham, three days before Willingdon's name was submitted to George V for formal approval, that the participants realised that Amery knew nothing of the impending announcement. Measures were hastily taken to ensure he was briefed.³⁹

The appointment of Willingdon signified a vital development both in the status of the Governor General and the relations between Canada and Britain, indeed more significant than even King appreciated. Two new changes in the selection process had occurred. First the negotiations were conducted between Prime Ministers with the exclusion of the Dominions Secretary, thus signifying a recognition that these discussions were government to government, equal to equal, not superior to inferior. King never knew that the negotiations had been exclusively confined to himself and Baldwin; to the end, he discerned Amery's interference.⁴⁰ Second, what King did not realise fully was that Willingdon had not been Whitehall's choice and would not have been included at all except for the British supposition that he was favoured by King. King believed he had established a precedent by requesting a list from the British. This precedent already stood. What King failed to appreciate was that he had

progressed beyond the established practice of Canada's selecting a name from a British list, to directing what names would be on that list. For the first time, without King's awareness of the novelty, the Governor General was truly the man of the Canadian Government, not a man of the British Government. This point was better grasped in Whitehall where ministers showed a degree of recognition that no longer was the Canadian Governor General their representative. Of course, tied up in this curious acknowledgement by politicians and officials in Whitehall was the ill-founded assumption that until the appointment of Willingdon the Governors General in Canada had been representing and responsible to the British Government. As time proved, Willingdon was the final stage in making the Canadian Governor General a part of the Canadian Government with no responsibilities to represent the British Government. Also ill-founded were reservations that Willingdon would be ineffective in a self-governing Dominion. Willingdon became an active promoter of Canadian autonomy. He refused to participate in any inter-governmental communications and supported King's assertion that the Governor General had no role in Canada's communications with Britain.

With his successor selected, the final months of Byng's term as Governor General should have been quiet and satisfying ones as he paid farewell trips and received tributes. This was not to be. What neither Byng nor King could have predicted was that a constitutional crisis would dominate Byng's final weeks in the summer of 1926. The events of this crisis, which produced one of the gravest rifts between a Governor General and his prime minister in Canadian history,

was the making of Mackenzie King and the breaking of Lord Byng.

Constitutional Crisis of 1926: The King-Byng Affair

It is necessary to touch briefly on the Canadian Constitutional Crisis of 1926, which has been named the King-Byng affair. It is, after all, from this dispute that many of the myths concerning the actual role of the Governor General and much of the legend which surrounds King as the great defender of Canada's autonomy stems. Ranked as one of the great Canadian constitutional controversies, the affair is often portrayed as the occasion when the Governor General overstepped the boundaries of discretion and attempted to manipulate Canadian politics by denying Mackenzie King the right to dissolution only to grant it within days to his political opponent and brief successor, Arthur Meighen.

Many competent studies have been written about the King-Byng affair.⁴¹ It is not the intention of this study to duplicate these works, except to recall the essential details of the crisis and to assess the affair in the broader context of the era. The controversy tends to be studied in a vacuum and under the illusion that Byng was caught unprepared for the tactics which King would employ. While Byng has been absolved from charges of wrongdoing, it is difficult not to question his ability to learn from previous encounters. In fact, Byng had had an opportunity to gain insight into King's thinking and tactics as early as 1923 when he came into conflict with King over the publication of private correspondence. Even if the Constitutional Crisis of 1926 could not have been avoided nor the tactics King used prevented, Byng's personal

devastation in 1926 could have been prevented if he had learnt from his experience in 1923.

Sladen Affair: test run for a crisis

The Halibut Treaty, discussed earlier, was a landmark in the relations between Canada and Britain. One consequence of the treaty, not already discussed, is how it brought Lord Byng into dispute with King. This conflict was the first to occur after Byng became Governor General and the most serious until the Constitutional Crisis of 1926. The two men clashed as the result of King's publication of the secret correspondence relating to the treaty without the permission of Britain and without consulting the United States. King's action involved two issues. First, King challenged the role of the Governor General and indeed the right of Britain to censor the Canadian Government as to what information could be made public. Second, King and Byng disagreed for the first time since King served as Byng's first minister. The wrangling between the two men was a foretaste of their 1926 conflict.

The conflict began modestly. Meighen, as leader of the opposition, accused King of pursuing secret diplomacy over the Halibut Treaty. King, wishing to exonerate himself, asked Byng to request permission from the British Government to publish the private correspondence in the affair. Byng sent his request to the Colonial Office,⁴² but King chose to proceed with publication before approval came. Byng was irritated by this breach of accepted procedure. King, in Byng's view, had no right to release this information, and in a letter to Devonshire, now the Colonial Secretary, he wrote that he was seeking a full explanation from King. Byng's good

will towards King remained intact as he sought to defend King's action to Britain by explaining that Meighen had applied great pressure on King. Byng also believed that King was 'extremely ignorant of the amenities that are always observed between governments,' and that this in part might explain King's 'amazing indiscretions'.⁴³

Another person annoyed by King's action was Sir Auckland Geddes, the British Ambassador at Washington. Among the correspondence published was some exchanged with the United States Government. Geddes condemned this breach of convention and feared the damage it would cause to Anglo-American relations. He concluded that the only course of action was for Canada to apologise to the United States Government.⁴⁴ The Foreign Office supported his recommendation.⁴⁵ The Colonial Office delayed its response to Byng for two months.⁴⁶ In the interim, Byng took matters into his own hands by demanding an explanation from King.

King defended himself by explaining that the correspondence had to be released in order to defend himself against false allegations from Meighen. While he accepted responsibility for his action, he denied that he had consciously transgressed any rule or customary practice. He would not address the potential damage caused, particularly in relations with the United States, but tried to concentrate on the question of the publication of correspondence. He believed such a decision must rest wholly with the Canadian Government. Had any other policy been pursued it would have been:

'increasingly difficult to avoid the charge that the Administration is lending itself to a species of secret diplomacy with respect to public business...[which] were the impression permitted to

be fostered, would be most unfortunate for our inter-imperial and international relations.'⁴⁷

A.F. Sladen, Lord Byng's private secretary, made it clear that he had taken particular pains to inform King's secretaries of the proper course of proceeding. Not wanting to accuse King unfairly, Sladen suggested that these secretaries had obviously failed to convey this information.⁴⁸ King persisted in justifying his action. 'There are few replies,' he wrote to Byng, 'calculated to arouse stronger resentment with respect to Canada's inter-imperial and international relations than that "permission is being asked of the Colonial Office to bring down certain of the correspondence"; or that "correspondence cannot be made public". Every time such admissions have to be made by the government in the House of Commons, a weapon is handed to those who are in search of arguments wherewith they can ridicule the so-called national status of Canada, or raise a question concerning existing relations between the governments of the Dominion and of the United Kingdom.'⁴⁹

King successfully obscured the issue of normal procedures in publishing correspondence with other governments, without permission, by opening the question of publication of correspondence and the jurisdiction of the Governor General. The same issue appeared again at the time of the Treaty of Lausanne. The dispute intensified when Joseph Pope prepared a memorandum for King stating the Canadian Government had the right to publish correspondence, without permission, so long as it was not 'secret or confidential'.⁵⁰ Sladen took it upon himself to refute Pope's assumptions. He argued that since it was the role of the Governor General to communicate with the

British Government, his name went on the telegrams and therefore he held the right to permit publication or not. In this capacity, the Governor General consulted the Colonial Office, but never refused publication unless it placed either government in a difficult position. Regarding confidential correspondence, the Governor General was obliged to seek permission from the Colonial Secretary. Since Sladen was not aware that there had been any change in the procedure, Pope was wrong in his statements.⁵¹ When King heard of Sladen's interpretation that no correspondence could be published without permission, he was annoyed, commenting that 'Sladen goes too far.'⁵² Thereafter, King nurtured a grudge against Sladen. Also, whenever an action from Rideau Hall occurred which King did not like, King always attributed the action to Sladen.⁵³

Curiously, while Byng in 1923 observed and disapproved of King's behaviour, of King's obscuring the main question by tossing in another, Byng seems not to have learned from the experience. In 1923, Sladen fell victim to King's ability to avoid the true issue. Byng might have guarded himself much better in the crisis of 1926 if he had profited from his encounter with King's tactics in 1923, and put less faith in King's verbal agreements.

The King-Byng Affair:

The crisis began with the Canadian General election of 1925, when King once again failed to secure a majority government. On 29 October 1925, the Canadian electors delivered a verdict of a 'hung jury': the Conservatives won the largest group of seats with 116, five seats short of a

majority government. Both the Liberals and the Progressives suffered losses. The Liberals retained only 99 of their previous 117 seats, while the Progressives fell from 61 to 21 seats in the House of Commons.⁵⁴ Byng encouraged King to give way and allow the Conservatives to form a government. King initially favoured this course but he then decided to remain in office. King shaped his policies with the hope of gaining support from the Progressives in the House of Commons.⁵⁵ King chose to justify his action by saying that the Parliament had the right to decide whether a government had the confidence of the House to carry on. Although not pleased with King's decision, Byng acquiesced after he was convinced that he had extracted a verbal promise from King that if his government collapsed he would permit Meighen and the Conservatives to form a ministry. Believing that King would honour this verbal agreement, was Byng's gravest misjudgment, particularly after the Sladen Affair of 1923. King's refusal to do so at a later date left Byng devastated.

In the early months of 1926, when Parliament convened and King's Government secured the confidence of the House, King appeared justified in his belief that the government could carry on. It was not until a scandal in the Customs Department that the King Government became unstable. A large smuggling scandal emerged. One Member of Parliament, H.H. Stevens, estimated that \$200 millions worth of goods were involved.⁵⁶ In the investigation conducted, many officials in the department were implicated including the Minister. Events unfolded quickly, and with more revelations, the Progressives slowly withdrew their support for King. After heated debate, King faced a motion of censure. With the

withdrawal of the Progressives' support, it appeared certain that the ministry would lose the vote. It was at this point that Byng was drawn into the crisis. In an attempt to avoid the vote of censure, King requested that Byng grant him dissolution and call a general election. Byng did not refuse King a dissolution outright, but agreed to grant it on one condition, that King first face the vote of censure. King refused since it was clear that he would lose the vote and this devastating condemnation would damage his standing with the electorate. When Byng refused to grant an immediate dissolution, King indignantly resigned believing that he was the victim of British interference.

Byng then asked Meighen and the Conservatives to form a government. This ministry was to be short-lived as King proved masterful at undermining the confidence of the House in the legitimacy of the government. In a vote of confidence, only days after assuming power, the Conservative Government collapsed. Meighen then sought and received a dissolution from Byng. For King this was the final treacherous act: that Byng had refused him a dissolution, only within days to grant it to Meighen. Byng defended his action on the ground that he was justified in trying to avoid another general election so quickly on the heels of the last. Once it was evident that neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives commanded the confidence of the House, he had no choice but to call a general election. King did not regard Byng's action in this light but instead saw it as gross insult to the self-governing autonomy of Canada, that an outsider would dare to manipulate the Canadian political system. Byng's action provided King with the ideal campaign issue - British interference in

Canadian affairs which must be stopped once and for all. Lost in the fervour of this argument, to the advantage of the Liberals, was the Customs Department scandal. While scholarly investigations, including Eugene Forsey's landmark study⁵⁷, have supported Byng and ruled that he did not overstep the bounds of his powers nor compromise Canada's autonomy, King was the immediate winner as the Canadian electorate gave him his first majority government.

Within a month of the result, both Byng and King were in London, the former at the end of his term of office and the latter to attend the Imperial Conference of 1926. The moods of the two men sharply contrasted. While King was riding the tide of victory, possessing a new sense of confidence, Byng was broken and disillusioned. He felt that King had unfairly misrepresented the facts, and had attacked him knowing that in his position he could not speak out either in defence or clarification. Worse still, Byng was shocked that King had reneged on his earlier verbal agreement. Privately, Byng's side was taken in British circles.⁵⁸ Publicly, however, Whitehall knew that it still had to contend with King as Canadian Prime Minister, and it braced itself for what it predicted would be an awkward and demanding encounter. The surprise was that King was not as difficult as had been feared nor were these demands so pressing. As had been anticipated, King sought changes in the Governor General's status. But while King believed that he had secured a great victory in limiting the role of the Governor General, he had in fact only formalised what was already practice. The crisis, seen in light of the developments which evolved during the 1920s, was not instrumental in effecting change. It was an anti-climax,

and if anything a smoke screen which distracted and obscured what had occurred. Historically, the crisis, was, in many ways, more of an exception than a true portrayal of the status of the Governor General. In the context of the times, it appeared to spur King's push for a redefinition of the Governor General's role at the Imperial Conference of 1926. King no doubt regarded his success at the Conference of 1926 in limiting the powers of the Governor General as a great coup. King believed that he had relegated the Governor General to the role of a figurehead who took instruction from his Canadian ministers. This interpretation fails on many counts, as King had already made it clear in his diary⁵⁹ and correspondence⁶⁰ as early as April 1926, long before the crisis erupted, that he was determined to restrict the communications between the Governor General and Britain. The crisis did not alter his intentions, but it strengthened his bid. In retrospect, the crisis is regarded as a turning point in the status of the Governor General since, whether technically correct or not, this was the last time a Governor General came into such public conflict with his Prime Minister. Never again would a Governor General dare to invoke his power to act against the wishes of his Prime Minister.

The King-Byng affair precipitated the general election of 1926 which was a watershed in British-Canadian relations. British hopes of having a Canadian Prime Minister who would support the holding together of the last strands of diplomatic unity were lost when Meighen was defeated. King's majority government, his first one, meant that Whitehall could no longer dream of eliminating this Canadian nationalistic nuisance nor escape dealing with him. For King, victory in

the crisis strengthened his mandate to restrict the role of the Governor General. It, moreover, boosted his confidence as he attended his second Imperial Conference. Here, he was far more comfortable than he had been in 1923, but he was equally determined not to relax his guard over suspicions that Britain was still attempting to lock Canada into a centralised system. King was not wrong. Although King used different tactics in 1926, than he had in 1923 when he had been confrontational, his firm resolve in securing formal restrictions on the role of the Governor General forced Britain down the last path that led to ending formal diplomatic unity.

The changes in the Imperial Conference of 1926 adopted were not new but the result of trends which had been developing since Devonshire assumed office. They were trends to which King had been a contributor, but not a dominant one. This is, of course, not to undervalue what he did achieve. King could not take credit for the alterations to the appointment procedure of a Governor General or for the Governor General ceasing to keep the British Government unofficially informed. King did, however, exclude the Governor General from official communications between Britain and Canada. King's action extinguished Whitehall's hope to work within the old structure of communications. King also ended Amery's desire to have the Governor General provide more information, especially unofficial, to Britain.

If King cannot legitimately take the credit for limiting the Governor General's role to one of acting exclusively on behalf of his Canadian advisers, who can? Surprisingly the credit must go to Devonshire, Byng and Baldwin. The Governors General, first Devonshire and then Byng, distanced the

Governor General's office from Whitehall and ended the obligation of keeping London informed. Baldwin confirmed that by 1926 the Governor General was no longer a representative of the British Government but an exclusive component of the Canadian Government. Baldwin did this by negotiating directly with King about appointing a new Governor General, and then by accepting the candidate whom the Canadians wished to have. It was the efforts of Devonshire, Byng and Baldwin which allowed King to make the final step of formally limiting the role of the Governor General in 1926. King's successful efforts to secure formal recognition of these restrictions extinguished any British hope of using this avenue to preserve diplomatic unity.

1. John Hilliker, Canada's Department of External Affairs: vol. 1. The Early Years, 1909-1946, Montreal, 1990, pp. 5-71, *passim*.

2. Victor Christian William Cavendish, 1868-1938. Liberal Unionist MP, 1891-1908. Financial Secretary to the Treasury, 1903-5. Succeeded his uncle as the 9th Duke of Devonshire, 1908. A Civil Lord of the Admiralty, 1915-16. Governor General of Canada, 1916-21. Secretary of State for the Colonies, October 1922-January 1924.

3. NAC, King Diaries, 18 March 1926.

4. Harold Macmillan, Winds of Change: 1914-1939, London, 1966, pp. 110-111.

5. Milner Papers, 383(1), ff. 5, Devonshire to Milner 20 January 1919.

6. Milner Papers, 383(1), ff. 7-8, Milner to Devonshire, 25 March 1919.

7. Milner Papers, 383(1), ff. 7-8, 21-7, 34-5, 43-7. From January 1919 until July 1920, available documentation shows only one private letter from Milner to Devonshire, 25 March 1919, in which Milner is quite frank in his opinions. Devonshire's letters to Milner are dated: 12 April 1919, 2

June 1919, 19 November 1919 and finally 9 July 1920. The first three letters are handwritten and decrease from seven to four to two pages in length. The final letter is typed and extremely brief. Each letter consists primarily of information regarding the political tensions and manoeuvres.

8. NAC, Borden Papers, C4425, f. 145699, Borden to Amery, 2 December 1926.

9. This most notable being C.P. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 2: 1921-1948, Toronto, 1981.

10. NAC, Borden Papers, C4433, ff. 153771-75, Borden to King, 10 January 1923.

11. NAC, Borden Papers, C4433, ff. 153771-75, Borden to King, 10 January 1923.

12. Milner Papers, 62(2), ff. 185-88, Milner to Lloyd George, 4 July 1919.

13. Two other names which have appeared are those of the Prince of Wales, later the Duke of Windsor and Lord Desborough. A. Geddes, the British Ambassador at Washington, felt the Prince of Wales was the best choice, but after him the next best was Lord Byng. Arthur Currie, the esteemed Canadian General from the Great War strongly favoured Byng over Desborough. Lloyd George Papers, F60/4/14, A. Geddes to P. Kerr, 6 March 1921; A. Currie to Geddes 2 March 1921.

14. NAC, Meighen Papers, C3225, ff. 15370-74, Churchill to Meighen, 25 March 1921. Churchill sent along the names which he believed Milner had already forwarded to Meighen. The names were the Duke of Atholl, Lord Desborough, the Earl of Dundonald and Lord Byng. Churchill dismissed Dundonald as 'too aged' and Atholl as not investing 'the office in its more serious side with distinction.' In view of the reluctance in Canada to have a military man such as Byng, Churchill found Desborough suitable. He also forwarded the name of the Earl of Lytton as another possibility.

NAC, Meighen Papers, C3225, f. 15381, Churchill to Meighen, 12 May 1921. Churchill at this time informed Meighen that Desborough was unwilling to serve and wished to know if he should approach Lytton. The response to this was that Meighen was willing to accept Byng.

15. PRO, CO 42/1033/490, Devonshire to Churchill, 3 June 1921.

16. Lloyd George Papers, F/9/3/44, Churchill to Lloyd George, 25 May 1921.

17. Milner Papers, 62(2), ff. 185-88, Milner to Lloyd George, 4 July 1919.

18. PRO, CO 42/1032/4730, clipping from Toronto Globe, 11 January 1921.

19. PRO, CO 42/1033/19278, extract from the Canadian Senate Debates, 5 April 1921. Sir James Lougheed responding on behalf of the Government to a question on the appointment of a new Governor General: 'The office is one peculiarly within the authority of the Imperial Government, and while every courtesy would doubtless be shown to Canada as to any appointment to be made, yet it would not be desirable that this Government would suggest any particular appointee for the office; nor is it, in the judgement of this Government, desirable that under present conditions the Imperial Government should in any sense relinquish or divide its responding to any appointment so to be made.' G. Fiddes, an official in the Colonial Office minuted it as an 'important statement' on 26 April 1921.

20. NAC, King Papers, C2277, ff. 99040, O.D. Skelton to Garfield A. King, 11 August 1925.

21. NAC, King Papers, C2274, J. Buchan to King, 30 June 1925.

22. Amery Diaries (private collection), 24 November 1925.

23. NAC, King Papers, C2285, ff. 108556-59, Lord Beaverbrook to King 9 February 1926.

24. In an afterthought, Amery appended the names of the Marquess of Salisbury and Earl of Cromer.

25. University Library, Cambridge, Baldwin Papers, (hereafter Baldwin Papers), vol.96, ff.45-48, Amery to Baldwin, 8 February 1926.

26. Baldwin Papers, vol. 96, ff. 49-50, King to Baldwin, 10 February 1926.

27. Baldwin Papers, vol. 96, f. 51, A. Edgecumbe, Dominions Office to C.P. Duff, Prime Minister's Office, 11 February 1926.

28. NAC, King Diaries, 12 December 1925.

29. NAC, King Diaries, 8 February 1926. Other names discussed were Clarendon and Atholl.

30. NAC, King Diaries, 24 January 1926.

31. NAC, King Diaries, 8 February 1926.

32. NAC, King Diaries, 5 January 1926.

33. Baldwin Papers, vol. 96, f. 59, Amery to Baldwin, 15 March 1926.

34. Baldwin Papers, vol. 96, f. 59, Amery to Baldwin, 15 March 1926. Amery forwarded the views of George V; ff. 61-62, Sir Richard Waterhouse, private secretary to Baldwin, to Lord Stamfordham, private secretary to George V, 23 March 1926; and, f. 65, Stamfordham to Waterhouse, 25 March 1926.

35. Baldwin Papers, vol. 96, ff. 61-62, Waterhouse, Prime Minister's Office to Stamfordham, 23 March 1926; f. 65, Stamfordham to Waterhouse, 25 March 1926.

NAC, King Diaries, 14 April 1926. When King received the list of names he was pleased to see that Willingdon had been included and attributed the addition to the private letter sent by Byng to the King.

36. Baldwin Papers, vol. 96, ff. 66-72, Baldwin to King, 26 March 1926. The other three names forwarded were Samuel Hoare, Earl of Cromer and Marquess of Linlithgow.

37. Baldwin Papers, vol. 96, ff. 73-74, Amery to Baldwin, 27 March 1926.

38. Baldwin Papers, vol. 96, ff. 76-77, Amery to Baldwin, 1 April 1926. Amery informed Baldwin that he received an informal message from King through Violet Markham. King stated that he would welcome the addition of John Buchan's name to the list of candidates.

39. Baldwin Papers, vol. 96, ff. 90-91, Stamfordham to Sir R. Waterhouse, Prime Minister's Office, 11 May 1926. Stamfordham wrote that he was surprised to realise that Amery did not know of the impending announcement and thought that perhaps out of courtesy Baldwin should inform him.

40. NAC, King Diaries, 14 April 1926. King assumed the first three names submitted to him were at the insistence of Amery and that Willingdon had only been included because of Baldwin and the note sent from Byng to the King. Moreover, when Amery took it upon himself, apparently without notifying Baldwin, to write Byng to get him to press for either Cromer, Linlithgow or Hoare, King took this as a further indication that Amery continued to have a strong hand in the selection. King Diaries, 13 April 1926.

41. These studies include: H. Blair Neatby, William Lyon Mackenzie King, vol. 2, Toronto, 1963, pp. 60-209; E. Forsey, The Royal Power of Dissolution of Parliament in the British Commonwealth, Toronto, reprinted 1968, pp. 131-250; R. Graham, Arthur Meighen, vol. 2, Toronto, 1963, pp. 414-451; Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 2, pp. 73-83; and, Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth, pp. 261-265.

42. PRO, CO 532/235/13305, Byng to Devonshire, 14 March 1923.

43. PRO, CO 532/235/18296, Byng to Devonshire, 22 March 1923.

44. PRO, CO 532/235/25173, H.G. Chilton, on behalf of A. Geddes, to R.S. Sperling, Foreign Office, 30 March 1923.

45. PRO, CO 532/235/25173, R.G. Vansittart, Foreign Office to E.H. Marsh, Colonial Office, 24 April 1923.

46. PRO, CO 532/235/25173, Byng to Devonshire, 20 March 1923 and Devonshire to Byng, 18 May 1923. Byng first wrote to the

Colonial Secretary in March and it was not until May that Devonshire finally answered Byng.

47. PRO, CO 532/235/25173, King to A.F. Sladen, private secretary to Byng, 17 March 1923.

48. PRO, CO 532/235/25173, A.F. Sladen to King, 18 March 1923.

49. PRO, CO 532/235/18296, King to Byng, 21 March 1923.

50. PRO, CO 532/235/21648, Sir Joseph Pope to King, 20 March 1923.

51. PRO, CO 532/235/21648, A.F. Sladen to King, 12 April 1923.

52. NAC, King Diaries, 8 April 1923.

53. NAC, King Diaries, 4 October 1926.

54. J.M. Beck, Pendulum of Power, Scarborough, 1968, p. 174.

55. Neatby, William Lyon Mackenzie King, vol. 2, p. 96.

56. Neatby, William Lyon Mackenzie King, vol. 2, pp. 115-116.

57. Forsey, The Royal Power of Dissolution of Parliament in the British Commonwealth, pp. 249-250; Neatby, William Lyon Mackenzie King, vol. 2, pp. 147-148; Graham, Arthur Meighen, vol. 2, pp. 448-451.

58. R. Graham, ed., King-Byng Affair, 1926: A Question of Responsible Government, Toronto, 1967, Amery to Byng, 3 July 1926, p. 25.

59. NAC, King Diaries, 4 April 1926; 13 April 1926; 16 April 1926.

60. Baldwin Papers, vol. 96, ff. 82-87, King to Baldwin, 16 April 1926.

CHAPTER 8

1926-1928: THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA:

THE APPOINTMENT OF A BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER TO CANADA

The appointment of a British High Commissioner to Canada in April 1928 is a watershed in Anglo-Canadian relations¹, since it relegated formal imperial unity to the history books. It also showed the awareness that ahead lay the task of constructing a new version of unity in foreign policy. British recognition that its interests in Canada could be protected only by its own representative elevated relations with Canada to that of one foreign nation to another. Britain would have gladly avoided the appointment, but events permitted no escape from it. This was a conclusion forced upon Britain in part by the Imperial Conference of 1926, in part by the appointment of an American Minister to Ottawa, but primarily by Mackenzie King who stood his ground so firmly that the representation of British interests in Canada became a British problem. Because the British were so reluctant to take this step, it took eighteen months before a High Commissioner was appointed. The delay, moreover, revealed the continuing delusion within the British government about imperial relations and conflicting approaches to securing future unity.

The British and the Appointment

The possibility of appointing a British High Commissioner to Ottawa arose first in the Foreign Office in January 1926. The almost unanimous rejection of the idea at that time acts as a gauge to measure the remarkable evolution in thinking

which occurred by November 1926, when the Foreign Secretary embraced the idea. Equally significant was the foresight of one official in January 1926 to be bold enough to suggest the plan to a department which was still searching for unity through more traditional means. The first examination of the appointment of a British High Commissioner in the Dominions stemmed from a memorandum by P.A. Koppel in January, 1926.²

The Koppel memorandum, which has already been extensively discussed in Chapter Six, explored many of the familiar options for improving consultation: increasing the powers of the Dominion High Commissioners, appointing permanent Dominion Ministers for London to attend Cabinet, or expanding the Australian Casey experiment. As previously mentioned, the minutes in response to the Koppel document were numerous and from the most senior members in the department. Interestingly enough, the memorandum provoked the first proposal in Whitehall to place a British representative in the Dominions. Miles Lampson, an official in the Foreign Office, recommended that the time had come for Britain to take such a bold step, which would be 'the most important link in the chain' in establishing solid consultation with the Dominions. He favoured a man with experience in the diplomatic service, whose post would be separate from the staff of the Governor General and who would be empowered to give his views on any subject to the Dominion Prime Minister.³

This memorandum provoked such discussion and conflicting approaches that an internal committee⁴ was struck in the Foreign Office to deal with the issue. The committee unanimously rejected even contemplating the appointment of a British representative to the Dominions. Such appointments

might be a 'logical corollary' to the Dominion representatives to Britain, but the matter was best left until a Dominion specifically raised the question. This conclusion received wide approval including Chamberlain's.⁵ But time showed Lampson a most perceptive commentator.

Unknown to Lampson, he had an ally in Esmé Howard, the British Ambassador at Washington. In the spring of 1926, Howard informed Chamberlain of a discussion with Mackenzie King on the possible appointment of a British representative to Canada. King had decided to remove the Governor General completely from the realm of politics by ensuring that he did 'not receive orders from any political party which happened to be in power'. King intended to make sure that the Governor General no longer took instructions from or represented the British Government. In order to achieve this end, King envisaged two developments. First, the High Commissioner in London would have direct access to the British Prime Minister or the Secretary of State and would no longer work through the Dominions Office. Second, a British representative should be appointed to Canada, either under the title 'High Commissioner' or 'Minister Plenipotentiary', who would communicate directly with the Canadian Prime Minister. As a result, 'any mistakes the British Government might make would then be fastened' on the British representative and not on the Governor General.⁶

Howard fully supported King's proposal. He told Chamberlain that the time had come for the British Government to accept the fact that Canada must be treated as an equal, in order to dispel the conviction among Canadian nationalists that 'London is always trying to keep them under'. Howard was

motivated to a great extent by his experience in the United States. He was concerned with the high profile that the United States enjoyed in Canada and was unsettled by the increased Americanization of Canadian society. He considered that the chance of annexation of Canada by the United States remained remote. He acknowledged that the shift of Canadian allegiance away from Britain and the Empire and towards the United States was already occurring and would continue unless Britain countered the trend. 'We cannot pretend indefinitely to keep a country the size of Canada, with ten million inhabitants and vast potential resources, in a condition of political inferiority.' Howard was astute, too, in realising that the crucial attraction for King of a British representative was that no Canadian official would be responsible for conveying the views of the British Government.⁷ There is no indication that Howard's letter made much initial impact on Chamberlain. The Foreign Office still believed that it was through the enhancement of the role of Dominion representatives in London that the best consultation would be achieved.⁸ Reversal of this opinion came during and after the Imperial Conference of 1926.

Cabinet exerts itself:

One of the proposals Mackenzie King successfully promoted at the Imperial Conference of 1926 was ending the Governor General's role as the channel of communication between the Dominions and Britain. In an astute move, King extended the point by asserting that it was in Britain's interest to appoint its own representatives to the capitals of the Dominions. The first opportunity King had to advance this

scheme was in an informal meeting with Chamberlain.⁹ The meeting had originally been intended by Chamberlain to sound out and secure King's agreement to allow Canada's High Commissioner to take over as an intermediary between Canada and Britain. King rejected this suggestion, but used the occasion to urge Britain to appoint a representative to Canada. He argued that this was the best plan if Britain were worried about the lack of representation of British interests. In one respect, the proposal appeared to be solicitous of British interests since now they lacked an effective spokesman. As a political tactic, however, King's suggestion was a brilliant stroke. By rejecting completely all notions of exploiting the High Commissioners in London as the means of defending British interests, King placed the onus on Whitehall to find a solution to this problem. It was as a good friend, therefore, that he recommended what he saw as the only viable option: the placement of a British representative in Canada.¹⁰ The impression he conveyed that Canada was not going to budge on the matter persuaded Chamberlain that a British representative was the only possibility.¹¹

In the Inter-Imperial meeting at which King voiced his comments, the British representatives decided that many of the questions had to be reserved for discussion by the British Cabinet. In typical Amery fashion, the Dominions Secretary took it upon himself to write to the Governors General soliciting their private views on the matter. In his summary of events, Amery regarded King's proposal as two-fold: first, that the Governor General would cease to be the channel of communication; second, and consequently, that Britain should appoint a representative to the Dominion capitals. He judged

that the first suggestion would be implemented at an early date. The second had been accepted in principle but there seemed insufficient sense of urgency to suggest that early action was contemplated.¹²

Diverse views were expressed by the Governors General. Those of South Africa and Canada accepted both plans. Lord Willingdon, only months into his new position, considered it inappropriate that Amery should choose to describe the proposals from King as two separate matters. 'To my mind', wrote Willingdon, 'it must stand as a whole. If Governor General is to cease to be the official channel of communication I consider it essential that a High Commissioner should be appointed at the same time as the Governor General's position is altered.'¹³ A counter view was expressed by the Governors General of New Zealand and Australia. The strongest opposition came from the Governor General of New Zealand, who opposed both suggestions. His counterpart in Australia accepted the new channel of communication, but rejected such an appointment of a British High Commissioner. Both men regarded such an appointment as undermining the role of the Governor General and reducing it to little more than 'artificial ceremonial'.¹⁴ This stance was distinctly old-fashioned and it was the South African Governor General who rightly observed that, 'with development of the status of the Dominions it was to be expected that the functions of Governor General should undergo some change, and there is no doubt his position as the King's representative and also in some sense agent of the British Government is liable to lead to difficulty.'¹⁵ While the South African Governor General was shrewd in his forward vision, his counter-part in New Zealand

summed up the crucial meaning of placing a British High Commissioner in the Dominion capitals. 'The appointment of High Commissioners for Great Britain would, of course, place the Dominions in much the same category as foreign countries and presupposes the same relations with frequent conflict of interests between the centre of the Empire and its component parts as now exists between Great Britain and a foreign nation.'¹⁶

Amery brought the responses of the Dominion Governors General to the British Cabinet meeting of 10 November. Amery proposed to the British Cabinet King's suggestion of placing British High Commissioners in the Dominions. Although the scheme had the support of the Foreign Secretary, the Dominions Secretary, and the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, in a surprising move, chose to reject it. The Cabinet's decision caught Amery and Chamberlain off-guard because it went against the pattern firmly established in the 1920s. Since the 1920s the British Cabinet took little interest in Dominion affairs leaving details to the Dominions Office and the Foreign Office and gave virtually rubber-stamp approval to their recommendations. Both Chamberlain and Amery were disturbed about how Cabinet's new exertions might hinder changes in imperial relations. Baldwin, however, was not alarmed with the Cabinet's decision. He concluded that the opposition 'which showed itself in certain quarters' was not a sign that the Cabinet would impede changes in imperial relations. Baldwin believed that the Cabinet's reaction was due 'to their being taken by surprise by a novel proposition which they had imperfectly comprehended and not at all considered.' Baldwin believed that once the Cabinet understood the developments in

Britain's relations with the Dominions then all opposition to appointing British High Commissioners to the Dominions would end.¹⁷

The question must be asked why the Cabinet suddenly decided to intervene and block the appointment at what might seem to be the closing phase of the break-up of imperial foreign policy. One explanation might be that the Cabinet reflected a wider range of political opinion which had not yet come to embrace the more informed views of a select minority of ministers and officials involved in the evolution of the relationship between Britain and the Dominions. In the preceding chapters emphasis has been placed on understanding the interactions between the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office and later the Dominions Office, and to a lesser extent the Prime Minister's Office. While this concentration of attention is required and justified since it was in these departments that the key decisions were made regarding the break-up of imperial foreign policy, it can lead one into the false impression that the precedent-setting events were being watched and understood by a much larger audience. As the Cabinet's rejection of the appointment of a British High Commissioner shows, however, many of the substantial changes which had occurred in imperial relations remained the knowledge of a select few. The belief of the Cabinet that blocking the appointment of British High Commissioners could prevent the break-up of the imperial unity in foreign policy was not only naïve, but also hopelessly out of step with the new realities of the imperial relationship.

The Cabinet delayed the appointment of a British High Commissioner by eighteen months. This was a delay which the

British Government could ill afford since agreement had been reached that as of July 1927 the Governor General would cease to be the channel of communication. Thus, from July 1927 until April 1928, when the first British High Commissioner was appointed to Canada, Britain was effectively without a voice in Canada. During the eighteen months it took to resolve the matter, the initial accord between the Dominions Office and the Foreign Office quickly gave way to tensions. Yet again the two departments were at loggerheads, with Amery and Chamberlain taking an active part. Curiously, it was Chamberlain who took the progressive lead. He had the clearer understanding of what Mackenzie King in particular sought, and so strong were Chamberlain's convictions, that he stood his ground not only against Amery, but also at times against opposition from within his own office.

Conflict between Amery and Chamberlain:

Within two days of the Cabinet's decision Amery conceived a new proposal to get around the objections of his colleagues. He decided the answer was to have one person act as a liaison on imperial policy between the Foreign Office and other British Government departments. This person would defend British interest in public through speeches and commercial matters. It was essential, Amery concluded, that 'the high sounding title of High Commissioner' should be avoided as it 'may perhaps create the danger of seeming to compete with the Governor General's position.' Under this scheme, Amery favoured appointing two officials with two lesser titles. One to be given the title Agent General, who 'would be rather what the High Commissioners used to be over here before their

functions were exalted and their status approximated that of Ministers.' The other was to be a liaison officer, either similar to a first secretary of legation or a good standing civil servant from either the Foreign Office or the Dominions Office. Since Canada was the only Dominion forcefully urging the issue, Amery predicted that Britain might have to appoint the two men only to Canada, whereas an Agent General might be sufficient in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the Irish Free State.¹⁸

Chamberlain did not respond favourably to Amery's proposal. He believed that it ignored the opinion of Mackenzie King who had made it clear that 'so far as liaison at the Canadian end is concerned ... there should be an official competent to give him considered advice as to the policy of HMG in foreign affairs.' Chamberlain noted that the critical point in King's view was that 'he did not wish whatever Agent he had in London to bear the responsibility of repeating to him what HMG here might say. He wished these communications to be made by an official of our Government and the responsibility for their accuracy and completeness to rest with us and not with any Canadian official.' Finding Amery's proposal totally inappropriate, Chamberlain forwarded his own proposal that the official should come from the Diplomatic Service and should rank no less than a Counsellor 'if he is to carry such responsibility as Mr. Mackenzie King indicates.' Thus, instead of a more junior official, Chamberlain saw the only recourse was the appointment of an individual who 'must at least be such a man as I would place in charge of a minor Mission abroad, or in the case of one of the greater Missions, be ready to leave in charge when the Ambassador was absent.'

I do not quite see how this would be reconcilable with the idea of his being a subordinated or at any rate an inferior official to a Trade Commissioner or Agent General.¹⁹

Not content to leave his point there, Chamberlain wrote to Lord Balfour, Lord President of the Council, to stress that Amery's proposal was misguided as it opposed Canadian wishes that no Canadian representative accept the responsibility for communicating the British view to the Canadian Government.²⁰ It is interesting that Chamberlain felt the need to convey this view to Balfour so quickly and with such determination. The conflict between Chamberlain and Amery was beginning.

Relations between them further deteriorated as the Dominions Secretary continued to press the matter. In early December, he attempted to skirt the issue of appointing a British High Commissioner, or some form of a liaison officer, by trying to enhance the role the Dominion High Commissioners in London. He renewed pressure on the Dominion Prime Ministers, without consulting Chamberlain, to allow their High Commissioners to receive Foreign Office telegrams. When Chamberlain heard of the matter he was enraged. The controversy deepened when Chamberlain learned that Australia, New Zealand and Canada had reversed their earlier stances at the Imperial Conference and were now willing to let their High Commissioners receive the material. Chamberlain accepted that he must support Amery but he did so in such a way that he left the Dominions Secretary in no doubt of his dissatisfaction. 'You have', wrote Chamberlain on his Christmas holidays to Amery, 'committed me without consultation, and I must submit; but I respectfully but very decidedly protest against your assumption that you had a right to take action so intimately

affecting me without consultation with me.' Chamberlain admitted that prior to the conference he had shared with Amery a preference for the Dominion High Commissioners to act as the channel of communication between Britain and Canada on matters of imperial foreign policy. But the views expressed by the Dominion Prime Ministers at the conference proved to him that they preferred a British liaison officer in their capitals as the channel of communications on foreign policy. Chamberlain concluded that Amery 'had made a mistake'²¹ in pursuing the avenue of the Dominion High Commissioners.

Within two days, 23 December 1926, Amery wrote to say that he was 'distressed' with Chamberlain's accusatory letter and could only conclude that it arose from the Foreign Secretary's misunderstanding both his actions and the attitudes of the Dominion Prime Ministers. Amery tried to defend himself by arguing that both he and Chamberlain had attended the Imperial Conference with the hope of convincing the Dominion Prime Ministers to permit their High Commissioners to be able to 'deal with us on matters of common Imperial concern', which meant allowing access to documents to be forwarded to their governments. Although the Prime Ministers had concurred in principle to liaison officers, he disagreed with Chamberlain that, with the exception of Mackenzie King, they were anxious to have this plan implemented. Amery acknowledged that King was 'timid' about High Commissioner meetings, but attributed this to King's being 'afraid that someone at this [a High Commissioners meeting] might be consulted fairly frequently and so implicate him rather more than he might wish.' Amery, however, tried to

draw comfort from the fact that King in the end agreed that his High Commissioner should receive documents.²²

Missing in Amery's letter of defence was the matter that Chamberlain saw as the number one priority: resolving the pending loss of a channel of communication to the Dominions on British policy. Amery rectified his oversight and within twenty-four hours, without prompting from the Foreign Secretary, a companion letter was sent to Chamberlain addressing the matter of British High Commissioners in the Dominions, or at least some form of liaison officer.

In his further communication of 24 December, Amery briefly mentioned a note from Chamberlain which contained a list of potential candidates for British High Commissioners in the Dominions. Apart from Canada, Amery felt that neither the Dominions nor the Cabinet was ready for such a step, although the Cabinet might be convinced of its necessity if the United States appointed a representative to Canada. When the time did come for such an appointment, Amery believed Britain had 'to be very careful to avoid ... the impression that our relations with the Dominions are of the same character as our relations with foreign countries.' As reluctant as he was to discuss the appointment of British High Commissioners, he began to explore how such appointments might be done. The Dominions Secretary was anxious that the arrangements should be made in such way that they would give stature to the Dominions Office. At this point, Amery still envisioned a partnership with the Foreign Office and he had not yet begun his campaign to have the appointment made through the Dominions Office. Instead, he was willing to contemplate two courses of action. If the High Commissioner was a Foreign

Office man, he hoped that his chief assistant would be from the Dominions Office, or if the High Commissioner was a Dominions Office man, his assistant would come the Foreign Office. If the decision was to appoint only a liaison officer, Amery was willing to allow him to come from the Foreign Office, with the hope that he spent some time in the Dominions Office before assuming his post.²³

The matter weighed with Chamberlain enough that he composed a response the day after Christmas. He summarised his understanding of the matter, beginning with the Imperial Conference of 1926. He agreed that he, Amery and the Cabinet had attended the Imperial Conference with a view to improving consultation with the Dominions in foreign matters and he regarded the Dominion High Commissioners and their staffs as the best solution. What had become apparent to him at the conference, however, was that a liaison officer was badly needed, especially with both King and Bruce, the Prime Minister of Australia, since no longer could a Governor General be used for this purpose. No one except Bruce supported the High Commissioner scheme; the other Dominion Prime Ministers were unwilling to give their High Commissioners that kind of confidence. Recalling his informal meeting with King during the Imperial Conference of 1926, Chamberlain stressed that King had

stated clearly and repeatedly that he was not prepared to allow his High Commissioner to assume responsibility for conveying the mind of HMG or reporting what we desired him to have conveyed to him. This responsibility, he said, must rest with us, and he urged, at first strongly, that it should be discharged by an officer appointed by us to Ottawa. It is true that the latter hedged somewhat after the results of the Cabinet discussion had been reported to

him...and then said that he did not wish to press upon us a proposal which we did not approve and which was his; but he added that if anything went wrong in the future he should point to his proposal as justification and as having offered the means of avoiding such dangers had we chosen to act upon it. He further stated that had such a liaison existed in 1925, we might well have succeeded in getting the Treaty of Locarno negotiated in consultation with and approved by the Dominions and by Canada in particular - a view which I myself share.

Chamberlain noted that Hertzog, the South African Prime Minister, and Kevin O'Higgins, Vice-President and Minister of Justice of the Irish Free State Prime Minister, had supported King. Balfour, and even Amery, contended the appointment of a High Commissioner was required: '1) as position of Governor General has developed, we have no mouthpiece or agent in any Dominion, and 2) it was evident that effective liaison could only be established through a man of our own in their own capitals.' This proposal was brought to the Cabinet which unfortunately rejected it. Chamberlain attributed this decision to surprise and inadequate explanation. Given the support of Baldwin, who both approved and continued to encourage the appointment, it was only a question of time before the Cabinet was brought around to the idea. Chamberlain was therefore 'puzzled to account for the change' in Amery's approach since the Conference. 'I own I do not now see my way clear before me as regards liaisons with the Dominions, but I think it is impossible to admit that the United States shall have a Minister in Ottawa and Dublin and we continue without representatives in either capital - a new development as regards for representation in the Dominions to which you make no reference.'²⁴ There matters were left for the next three months. In the lull, a new factor entered the

equation with the appointment of American missions to Ottawa and Dublin.

The Appointment of an American Ambassador to Ottawa

The appointment of an American Ambassador to Ottawa in 1927 increased the pressure on Britain to have a representative in Ottawa. The British tried at first to prevent the appointment. They accepted it, however, once they realised it could not be blocked. Since the United States Government appointed an established, well respected diplomat and supplied him with a large budget, this gave the American Ambassador a prominent profile in Ottawa which added to Britain's difficulties.

In early December 1926, the United States requested British permission to place a Minister in Ottawa. This overture suggested that it was Britain which handled Canadian matters, despite the fact that Canada had already announced the appointment of its own representative to Washington. The United States also sought the placement of a minister in Dublin. Initially, one Foreign Office official regarded this an attempt, not by the legislative branch of the United States, but by President Coolidge and his advisers to 'give a wrong "twist" to the decisions of the recent Imperial Conference.'²⁵

The United States' request created an interesting disagreement between junior and senior officials within the Foreign Office. The former were keen to prevent the appointments to Ottawa and Dublin, but once the issue moved through to more senior ranks the prevailing view was that the British Government could not block the appointments. When one

official tried to argue that all Dominions must agree before any changes could be made in the relations of the Empire to foreign powers, Herbert Malkin and Cecil Hurst, two of the department's Assistant Under-Secretaries and Legal Secretaries, rejected the argument. In theory, they concluded that since Canada and the Irish Free State already had representatives in Washington, it was only right that the United States be permitted to reciprocate. As Malkin noted, 'from the point of view of principle there was no very material difference between foreign representation in Dominion capitals and Dominion representation in foreign capitals.'²⁶ In practice, however, Hurst and Malkin had objections to the appointments and sympathised with the view that all Dominions should agree before the appointments proceeded. They feared that American diplomats in the Dominions would become involved in the internal affairs of the British Empire and cause disruption to imperial unity. Hurst and Malkin suggested that while Britain could not refuse the request, the Canadian and Irish governments might be persuaded to reject the request.²⁷ Other Foreign Office officials shared Hurst's and Malkin's fear that the appointment would encroach upon imperial matters because American diplomats would take the side of the Dominion on any issue.

It is of course highly important that the conduct of any question with the United States Government which has, or may easily develop, an imperial aspect should remain the responsibility of HMG in Great Britain -- or at all events that they should know what is going on. This can be arranged without much difficulty at Washington; at Dublin and Ottawa it would be another matter, particularly when one remembers the tendency of American diplomatists to yield rather too easily to the influence of 'local

atmosphere' and to take on an 'independent line' on the slightest provocation.

It would unquestionably be in the ultimate interest of relations between the Empire and the United States if the Dominions could be induced politely to turn down the proposal -- at all events the appointment of Ambassadors.²⁸

Eventually, these objections were overruled by the Committee on Inter-Imperial Relations. This committee, which was dominated by the Foreign Office, (there were six members from the Foreign Office to three members from the Dominions Office), decided that it was 'impossible to suggest these objections' to Canada and the Irish Free State.²⁹ Amery, acting on this decision, telegraphed the two governments concerned about the request from the United States Government and asked their response. He did not offer any opinion of the British Government.³⁰ Canada responded positively within twenty-four hours to an appointment it regarded as 'appropriate' in view of its representation in Washington.³¹ The Irish Free State also welcomed the appointment.³²

The stationing of an American Ambassador in Ottawa increased the pressure on the British Government to place its own representative, but this did not become irresistible until an accomplished American diplomat, William Phillips, was chosen. The Foreign Office highly approved of the appointment and one official acknowledged that Phillips was 'even better',³³ than the new American Ambassador in Dublin, Frederick Sterling. During the next year, an attempt was made in Whitehall to underplay the significance of the American appointment, particularly in the Canadian context. Whether British politicians and officials wished to admit it or not, this appointment did affect them. Phillips' popular style

became an influential consideration in resolving the issue of appropriate British representation in Canada.

Resolving the issue: Amery versus Chamberlain

One key element of the American appointment was the expectations it raised not only in Britain but also in Canada. Although Mackenzie King announced to the Canadian House of Commons on 13 April 1927³⁴ that Britain would shortly be appointing a High Commissioner to Ottawa, who would act in a similar capacity as the recently appointed American and be the medium of transacting official business between the governments in Ottawa and London, there was little action in Whitehall. In May 1927, the matter was once again brought to the attention of the British Cabinet. A memorandum³⁵, prepared in the Dominions Office and endorsed by Chamberlain and Balfour, argued that with the Governor General no longer a representative of the British Government, 'not even to act as a post office'³⁶, Britain lacked representation in the Dominions. This created a 'weakness' in the inter-imperial system which was further strained by the appointment of United States diplomatic representatives of 'high and marked ability' at Ottawa and Dublin. The memorandum stressed that it was essential that Britain 'take the initiative'.³⁷ Acknowledging that something had to be done, the Cabinet appointed a committee to examine the issue. It fell to five ministers, Chamberlain, Amery, Winston Churchill, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Salisbury, the Lord Privy Seal, Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, the President of the Board of Trade, and several others including Balfour to hammer out an agreement.³⁸

Those in the Dominions Office, especially its Secretary, Amery, were reluctant to abandon recourse to the Dominion High Commissioners. Recognising that Britain must move with the times, if it were to protect its interests, Amery presented a plan at the first meeting of the committee in late June. In the absence of Chamberlain, he was able to dominate the meeting and field few questions or comments from his Cabinet colleagues.³⁹ Under the new scheme, Amery proposed that placing a liaison officer in New Zealand, a liaison officer in Australia, and a minor representative in South Africa. Britain would wait for the Irish Free State to express an interest before proceeding there. It was only in the instance of Canada that anyone of fuller stature was contemplated, but even here the Dominions Office was careful to define a minister of limited status. Keen to appoint someone who would counter the favourable impression that the new American minister was making in Ottawa, Amery was equally concerned to avoid the impression that the relationship between Canada and Britain was now one similar to that between two foreign countries. Shifting away from the earlier suggestion that the Foreign Office control the appointment, Amery recommended that the British minister be appointed by and be responsible to the Dominions Secretaries. The minister, furthermore, would be granted the powers to speak for the British Government on all matters including foreign affairs. Amery was now anxious that the first office-holder not be a diplomat in order to prevent the suggestion in that 'the relations between Great Britain and Canada were those of foreign countries' but he was willing to accept an assistant from the Foreign Office. Regarding the actual title, he settled upon High Commissioner for Great

Britain in Canada 'in default of better'. Amery wished to avoid a title which in everyday use could be reduced to 'British Minister' or any variation on Minister.⁴⁰

Amery's proposal opens up a number of questions. On the surface he appears to have been motivated by the desire to protect the imperial ties and prevent creating any impression to the world at large that the Britain's relations with Canada had changed, particularly to a relationship that resembled the one between foreign countries. At the same time, it is tempting to regard the move as a bid by Amery for enhanced power. The Dominions Office's involvement in Dominion relations would have diminished if the British representative came under the jurisdiction of the Foreign Office.

At the first meeting of the committee, the Foreign Office, as represented by William Tyrrell, the Permanent Under-Secretary, opposed Amery's policy. Tyrrell found the proposal unacceptable because it failed to conform with the wishes of the Dominion Prime Ministers, particularly those of Australia and Canada, who had expressed a wish to have representatives with whom they could confer and from whom they could receive advice on matters of foreign policy. Even in this first meeting, it became evident that the Foreign Office was concerned only with representation in Canada, as Tyrrell did not press for the sending of representatives to other Dominions. Regarding Canada, he stressed the need for a diplomat with the rank of minister. Anything less, he countered, would leave Britain at a disadvantage, since the United States appointed a Minister who was 'a trained expert fully acquainted with all the problems which were likely to rise between the United States and Canada.'⁴¹ In his

assessment of Amery's proposal for his 'chief', Chamberlain, Tyrrell dismissed the scheme as 'mainly shop-window dressing'. He argued that if Britain was trying to respond to the Dominions' desire to obtain knowledge of foreign affairs and thus improve their eventual share in directing it, Amery's plan was inadequate. Tyrrell feared that the scheme ran 'a grave risk of the Dominions rejecting it as a sham'. Furthermore, it failed to promote 'the unification of the Empire as regards foreign policy'.⁴²

In defining their perspectives, the Foreign Office and the Dominions Office were pointing out their differences in motivation. Whereas the Foreign Office broadly defined the demands of the post, the Dominions Office adopted a narrower scope, being almost exclusively concerned with foreign affairs. Accordingly, the Foreign Office advocated a proper minister of diplomatic stature in order to assist Canada with the increasingly difficult questions, such as fisheries, in her relations with the United States. The Foreign Office also thought that Britain must balance any gain that the United States made with the appointment of the distinguished diplomat, Phillips, to Ottawa. Another factor, of greater significance, was the Foreign Office's belief that the Canadian Government sought improved consultation in foreign matters because it wished to be involved in imperial policy as an active participant. Tyrrell was the first to raise this issue, but it echoed Chamberlain's opinion since, at the subsequent committee meeting, he brought up the example suggested to him by King that had such a structure been in existence Canada could have ratified the Locarno Agreement. The sincerity of this profession on King's part is

questionable, but Chamberlain, and those in the Foreign Office who were seeking such comforts, accepted it. Chamberlain admitted that he 'did not wish to lay too much stress on this last point, but it was not one which could be altogether disregarded'.⁴³ Consequently, the Foreign Office pitted itself against the Dominions Office and stood its ground that it wanted a diplomat appointed to Canada. It is curious that the argument of the appointment and the refinement of the credentials had now come to centre on satisfying Canada. Certainly from the Foreign Office's point of view, the main consideration was Canadian wishes and on this it concentrated its energies. Ironically the Foreign Office correctly recognised that a diplomatic appointment was the only suitable one for Canada, but this decision was reached for the wrong reason. The Foreign Office was clearly deluding itself if it thought this step would ensure Canada's commitment to imperial foreign policy. The Dominions Office, too, was pursuing its proposal on ill-founded assumptions. What it sought was a much broader arrangement whereby representatives from the Dominions Office would be located in each Dominion thus strengthening imperial ties.

Support on the committee for Amery's scheme waned primarily because of financial considerations. The Treasury, under Churchill's leadership, fussed over the funds involved. At the second meeting, Chamberlain took advantage of this by claiming that Amery's proposal was too ambitious and not necessary. Following Tyrrell's suggestions⁴⁴ closely, Chamberlain proposed that no new emissary be sent to South Africa as the official already there could have his title extended to being the British representative. With no

pressure or interest coming from Australia or the Irish Free State, no representatives needed to be sent there. Finally, New Zealand had indicated that all it required was a junior member from the Foreign Office. Thus with a clean stroke, Chamberlain reduced the requirements in South Africa, Australia, the Irish Free State and New Zealand to just one junior minister for New Zealand. Cleverly, however, he did not modify the arrangements he envisioned for Canada and continued to argue that an experienced diplomat should be appointed. Churchill, pleased with the savings, endorsed Chamberlain's proposal.

The scheme almost went ahead except for the objections of Lord Salisbury. Salisbury, a staunch member of the school of thought that all imperial foreign policy must be based in London, found the implications of appointing a diplomat to Canada unsettling. He feared this would undermine the unity of the Empire and play 'into the hands of the Canadian separatist element'. Salisbury grudgingly accepted, after hearing further arguments, that 'it was no longer practicable to insist on such an arrangement'. He qualified his support but stressed that where possible policy should be formulated in London. Balfour backed Salisbury expressing the not-so-progressive argument 'that any formal reconstitution of the Empire ought to be avoided'. This compromise, which appeared to keep a vestige of imperial unity intact, was endorsed by the majority of the committee. In the end, the committee accepted all the suggestions by the Foreign Secretary, except those arrangements for Canada. In the latter case the committee decided that Baldwin should discuss the matter with King on his Canadian trip.

On the issue of the title for the minister in Canada, Balfour stated the belief, which Chamberlain supported, that the title 'High Commissioner' be avoided. The Foreign Secretary favoured at best 'Senior Counsellor'. Amery again voiced misgivings that skirting around the title 'High Commissioner' opened the way for slang such as 'British Minister' which implied division. The committee declined to make a recommendation on the title, but agreed with Amery that the impression must be avoided that a British representative to Canada constituted a new path in British-Canadian relations, or that it was a response to the appointment of an American minister to Ottawa.⁴⁵ Here ended the involvement of the committee as the final stages were settled by Baldwin, Amery and Chamberlain.

The Foreign Office was unwilling to leave matters as decided by the committee. Chamberlain resolved in the autumn of 1927 to take his case to Baldwin.⁴⁶ In arguing his case, Chamberlain relied upon a lengthy memorandum prepared by Percy Koppel and Henry Maxse of the Dominions Information Department, an agency the Foreign Office established after the Imperial Conference of 1926. The memorandum returned to the theme of adequate consultation and then to imperial unity in foreign policy. Beginning in 1917 and tracing events to 1926, the document found the common thread in the need for consultation and adequate communication. Although MacDonald failed to resolve the matter in 1924, because the intended meeting never convened, the matter remained a priority as reflected by the deliberations of the Inter-Departmental Committee. This committee, preparing for the Imperial Conference of 1926, suggested the appointment of Dominion

representatives in London, a scheme which proved unacceptable to some Dominion Prime Ministers. King, though, indicated that a British representative in Canada was the answer. Underlying the Foreign Office's response to this idea was the assumption that the key role of the British representative would be foreign policy. Optimistically, the memorandum predicted this form of representation would satisfactorily provide the long-overdue consultation needed to ensure unity. Apart from its introductory comments, the memorandum focused on Canada, devoting two-thirds of its space to the Canadian case. Canada was a special case, because it was the only Dominion on the League of Nations' League Council, because of its 'propinquity to the United States', and the exchange of Ministers between Washington and Ottawa, and finally, because of all the Dominions it had been the most independent in breaking with imperial foreign policy. Again, optimism was expressed that if the appointment occurred as the Foreign Office envisaged, such breaches in unity such as Chanak and Locarno could be avoided. Chamberlain's belief that this was the best course reflected its endorsement by Mackenzie King. But the Foreign Office was keen to avoid the impression that this was a rupture in imperial relations. The memorandum concluded that the appointee should be

a member of the Diplomatic Service with the necessary experience acting as personal representative of the Prime Minister with the Canadian Prime Minister. This would give no colour to the idea that inter-imperial relations were on the same footing as foreign relations, but at the same time allowed the most urgent problems to be discussed adequately at Ottawa without delay and that the closest liaison be assured in those day-to-day matters, where it is most essential.⁴⁷

These arguments failed to convince Baldwin. Even more disastrously, by giving such weight to King's opinion, the Foreign Office had set the stage for its defeat on the issue.

The unravelling of the Foreign Office's proposal came in two stages. First, during Baldwin's visit to Canada for the country's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in the summer of 1927; and then during Amery's visit to Canada in early 1928. Baldwin's visit to Canada, together with his conversations with King and Lord Willingdon, had impressed upon him the need for a British representative in Ottawa. Lord Willingdon expressed his concern about the growing American influence, believing it was the intention of the United States to lure Canadian loyalties away from Britain. Given the limitations placed upon him as Governor General, Willingdon felt it was essential that Britain appoint a representative. Moreover, argued Willingdon, this representative ought to be able to 'compete favourably with Mr. Phillips'.⁴⁸ While the Cabinet committee examining the issue attempted to play down the American factor, clearly it was influential. When Baldwin instructed Amery to collect more information on his Canadian trip, he stressed that, 'in particular I would ask you to give special attention to the activities, personality and standing of the United States representative'.⁴⁹ Baldwin had returned to Britain realising that it was essential to appoint someone who could hold his own with the impressive stature of Phillips in Ottawa.⁵⁰

The exact qualification and status of the representative was hammered out further during Amery's trip to Canada. Under Baldwin's instructions, he enquired what would be considered a suitable appointment. In the final settlement of

qualifications for the appointment, the Foreign Office was once again trumped. As early as January 1926, the Foreign Office wanted the appointment to come from the ranks of the diplomatic service.⁵¹ As the matter received more prominence, Chamberlain and his Foreign Office officials urged the appointment of a diplomat and opposed the appointment of a politician.⁵² Amery, however, changed his view on who would make a suitable appointee. He agreed with Chamberlain that an ex-politician was unacceptable. He withdrew his support that the appointment be made from the junior ranks of the Foreign Office.⁵³ In an attempt to protect the Dominions Office stature, Amery wished the appointment to come from his office. The fatal blow to the Foreign Office came when Mackenzie King sided with Amery and opposed the appointment of a diplomat.

Mackenzie King: A distant but potent influence

King's opinion regarding the qualifications required for the British representative was the decisive factor in deciding whether the appointee would be a diplomat. It is ironic that King's opinion was so valued since King had, during much of the episode, tried to distance himself from the process. He took the position early on that it was a British not a Canadian matter. Even with a detached pose, however, King remained a potent force in hastening the process towards the appointment of a British representative to Canada.

Before his clash with Byng in the summer of 1926, King was already considering eliminating the Governor General as a representative of the Dominions Office, or more precisely as a representative of the British Government. In February 1926, King asserted that restricting the Governor General would

force the British to have 'High Commissioners or Ministers' in Ottawa.⁵⁴ This would be a highly congenial step to King, because it would define the Governor General in a purely Canadian context as one having only Canadian allegiance. More importantly for King, a British representative in Ottawa would resolve the issue of responsibility. He was anxious to prevent a Canadian minister being responsible for conveying or misrepresenting the intentions of the British Government. These views he expressed to Esmé Howard in May 1926 and then again in his informal meeting with Chamberlain during the Imperial Conference of 1926. 'I put forward the suggestion', wrote King of their meeting,

that the time had come when there should be a complete separation between the Office of Governor General as the representative of the Crown and that of representation of the Government being distinct from representation of the Crown. I suggested the logical course seemed to be development with the Empire of an inter-imperial organization for diplomatic purposes similar to that which exists between nations; instead of having ambassadors and ministers, so called, some other distinction could be given them. ... I pointed out that the British Government should send their communications through their own representative direct to myself and I could immediately get in touch with Cabinet and give a reply; we would be quickly and authoritatively informed; also we would do away with despatches [sic] which were a matter of record which might be called for by parliament and which had to be framed with a possible view to having them published later.

Both Chamberlain and [Sir William] Tyrrell seemed to view this development very favourably. My own belief is that it is constructive and will mark a point of departure which will further emphasize the equality of status between the self-governing Dominions and Mother Country, and will round out the national ideal in a manner which will preserve Empire unity.⁵⁵

King's message was clearly understood by Chamberlain, who gave it considerable weight. The conversation left Chamberlain with two strong impressions: first, that King 'wished these communications to be made by an official of our Government and the responsibility for their accuracy and completeness to rest with us and not with any Canadian official'; and, second, that King attached 'particular importance as far as liaison at the Canadian end is concerned ... that there should be an official competent to give him considered advice as to the policy of HMG in foreign affairs.'⁵⁶ Chamberlain used King's apparent desire for advice on foreign affairs as the chief reason for arguing that a British representative to Canada should come from diplomatic ranks.

After the Imperial Conference of 1926, King maintained a low profile in the discussion except for a prediction to the Canadian House of Commons in April 1927 that the appointment of a British High Commissioner was imminent.⁵⁷ Thereafter, King volunteered an opinion only when prompted by the British. During a visit to Canada in the summer of 1927, Baldwin pressed him further. King vaguely referred to the 'advantage of personal contacts and interviews as against despatches [sic] and the need for keeping Governor General out of [word illegible but appears to be of] all agency work for the British Government and keeping him solely as the representative of the King.'⁵⁸ He declined, however, to comment further believing his position was already clear. Amery tried to renew discussion during his tour of Canada in 1928. In his diary, King expressed annoyance at being asked an opinion on an issue of purely British concern, but he did

exchange words with Amery.⁵⁹ He expressed the apprehension that Britain was risking alienation of public opinion if it did not place someone of comparable status with the newly appointed American Ambassador to Canada.⁶⁰ He also remarked that the British representative should be a man with wide general knowledge of Dominion affairs and able to discuss British interests on several questions, including foreign affairs; but, he did not think 'a diplomat as such would meet the case.' He surprised Amery by recommending E.J. Harding for whom he held the 'very highest opinion after the Imperial Conference and Baldwin's visit.' If not Harding, King suggested, someone, 'possibly an M.P., with administrative knowledge.'⁶¹

This was a fatal blow to the Foreign Office's argument that King preferred not to appoint a diplomat and the fact that King went so far as to name someone from the Dominions Office as entirely suitable was a shock. Where previously the Foreign Office had exploited the views of King, it now tried to disown them. Having heard the outcome of the meetings with Amery, the Foreign Office now decried King as unreasonable. Attributing his views to 'personal idiosyncrasies'⁶² and being no more than 'a faithful disciple of Sir Wilfrid Laurier' who 'fears the responsibility for foreign policy'⁶³, Foreign Office officials advocated overriding King's views. They could see that what was needed, even if King was blind to it, was an appointment rooted in foreign affairs, namely a diplomat.⁶⁴ Despite the fact that officials tried to dismiss King's set of requirements as unrealistic, since he sought a 'universal genius'⁶⁵ or a 'superman'⁶⁶, the damage was done. The Dominions Office was able to have its way since it

appeared to best fit King's wishes to have an appointment which covered a much broader scope. While Chamberlain agreed with his officials, he had grown weary of the dispute. Although Chamberlain's father, Joseph, himself a great statesman, groomed Chamberlain to be the gentleman politician, Joseph Chamberlain also taught his son to be pragmatic. This pragmatism gave Austen Chamberlain the ability to fight a good fight, but it also enabled him to force a conclusion when a matter was dragging on. This capacity to conclude matters showed itself in the final stages of the High Commissioner issue. While his officials wanted to fight on, Chamberlain recognised the need to end the debate and hoped 'the matter may be soon settled and I trust that the settlement may be on wise lines.'⁶⁷ Since Baldwin sided with Amery's proposal, thus it was, in the months of February and March 1928 that Baldwin, Amery and Chamberlain hammered out the details of the appointment without returning to consult Cabinet.

Once King had indicated that he preferred a man with a background in Dominion affairs, and not in diplomacy, the last outstanding question was on the issue of title. The Dominions Office and the Foreign Office now found themselves in agreement on the fundamental principle that, whatever the title of the representative, it should not suggest that Canada and Britain were now behaving as two foreign countries. Chamberlain, for his part, initially favoured a form of variation of 'High Commissioner' along the lines of 'High Commissioners ambassadors',⁶⁸ but later backed a title such as Senior Counsellor. Similarly, by 1928, King had shifted his initial support away from 'High Commissioner'⁶⁹ believing that this title did not sound terribly impressive. Amery

attributed King's view to the fact that the title was originally conferred on Dominion High Commissioners when the Dominions did not have full status in the Empire and the work of the Dominion High Commissioners was limited.⁷⁰ Amery himself, however, continued to promote the title 'High Commissioner' as it was the least suggestive of a new relationship between Canada and Britain. In the end, Amery's recommendation prevailed.

Still hoping to attach significance to the appointment of a British representative to Ottawa, King offered him precedence over other foreign representatives. Amery decided this would be unwise because again it suggested that Canada and Britain enjoyed the relationship found between two foreign countries. To grant the British High Commissioner any diplomatic status suggested that the British representative represented the British Crown in Canada. Following the example of the Canadian High Commissioner in London, who represented the Canadian Government, the British High Commissioner in Ottawa, who represented the British Government, came after foreign representatives but above Privy Councillors.

Ultimately, among the various players, Amery was the most successful in getting his own way, when in April 1928, Sir William Clark was appointed the first British High Commissioner in Canada. King had failed to secure either E.J. Harding or a more impressive title. Likewise, Chamberlain had failed to secure the appointment of a diplomat or a mechanism to secure better consultation in foreign policy.

The appointment of Clark, with his background at the Board of Trade and Comptroller-General of the Department of

Overseas Trade, drew criticism in some quarters. P.C. Larkin, the Canadian High Commissioner in London, told King of his reservation that Clark 'was not in the same class' as the American Minister.⁷¹ After meeting and working with Clark for several months, King refuted this, noting 'I have gathered from a number of sources, the selection of Sir William Clark...is a good one. He has the kind of training which should enable him to understand the workings of our several departments of Government, as well as the relations which should govern between himself and Ministers of the Crown, and the Government officials.'⁷² King may have been a little generous in overlooking the fact that in the matter of qualifications, the American Minister's exceeded those of the British High Commissioner's. But King could afford to be generous. He was able to look beyond the man and his qualifications to grasp the significance of the appointment.

Whether the representative from Britain was under the Foreign Office or the Dominions Office, or whether Whitehall attempted to undermine the significance through a lesser title, the reality remained that matters had changed drastically. Britain had been forced to place its own representative in Ottawa in order to protect her interests. If Whitehall chose not to acknowledge this, its implication was not lost on King who saw it as the beginning of a new era. King wrote of the significance to Willingdon: 'we have regarded the High Commissioner as wholly the representative of the British Government, as distinct from the Crown.'⁷³

1. There has been little work down on the actual process involved with the selection of the first British High Commissioner to Canada. The one notable exception has been the article by Norman Hillmer, 'A British High Commissioner for Canada, 1927-28', The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, vol.3, number 3, May 1973. The article concentrates primarily on the years 1927-28 and the negotiations which occurred on between the Dominions Office and the Foreign Office and among various departments on the Cabinet sub-Committee appointed to deal with the matter.

2. PRO, FO 372/2197, T5885/5885/384, 'Consultation with Dominions on Foreign Policy', by P.A. Koppel, 16 January 1926.

3. Ibid., minute by M. Lampson, 1 February 1926.

4. PRO, FO 372/2197, T5886/5885/384. The members of the committee consisted of Montgomery, Gregory and V. Wellesley and were all appointed by W. Tyrrell.

5. Ibid., minutes concerning committee meeting, 21 April 1926, on Koppel's memorandum.

6. PRO, FO 800/259A, ff. 395-98, Howard to Chamberlain, 11 May 1926.

7. Ibid.

8. PRO, FO 372/2197, T6585/5885/384, minute by Koppel, 4 June 1926.

9. NAC, King Diaries, 25 October 1926.

10. NAC, King Diaries, 25 October 1926. King also voiced such views at an Inter-Imperial meeting at the Imperial Conference of 1926. Amery sent a summary of King's statement to all the Dominion Governor Generals. PRO, DO 117/44/D12381, Amery to Dominion Governor Generals, 5 November 1926.

11. PRO, FO 800/259B/858-860, Chamberlain to Amery, 12 November 1926.

12. PRO, DO 117/44/D12381, Amery to Dominion Governor Generals, 5 November 1926.

13. PRO, DO 117/44/D12381, Willingdon to Amery, 8 November 1926.

14. PRO, DO 117/44/D12381, Governor General of Australia to Amery, 8 November 1926.

15. PRO, DO 117/44/D12381, Governor General of South Africa to Amery, 8 November 1926.

16. PRO, DO 117/44/D12381, Governor General of New Zealand to Amery, 8 November 1926.

17. PRO, FO 800/259B/858-860, Chamberlain to Amery, 12 November 1926.

18. PRO, FO 800/259B/864-865, Amery to Chamberlain, 12 November 1926.

19. PRO, FO 800/259B/858-860, Chamberlain to Amery, 12 November 1926.

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72. NAC, King Papers, C2304, ff. 130939-44, King to Larkin, 20 July 1928.
73. NAC, King Papers, C2307, ff. 135288-89, King to Willingdon, 29 April 1928.

CONCLUSION

The passage of the Statue of Westminster by the British Parliament in 1931 established in law a new constitutional settlement between Britain and the Dominions. The foundation of this new relationship was the Balfour Report of 1926. This report, a product of the Imperial Conference of 1926, defined the relations between Britain and the Dominions:

They [the Dominions and Britain] 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.¹

As Nicholas Mansergh wrote of this definition of the new imperial relationship:

In this sentence four important characteristics of membership of the British Commonwealth, which comprised the United Kingdom as well as the dominions, were identified. The dominions were 1. autonomous communities 2. within the British Empire 3. freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations 4. united by a common allegiance to the Crown.²

The Statute of Westminster ended the sovereignty of the British Parliament over the Dominions and ended that imperial unity which can be described as formal unity or unity in form. The legislation confirmed the authority of each Dominion to legislate on matters previously within the jurisdiction of the Parliament of Westminster, and to legislate with extra-territorial effect. In this manner, the Dominions' autonomy was confirmed. At the same time, the Statue of Westminster protected the unity of the Dominions and Britain under one Crown.³ This development meant that the burden of imperial

unity shifted to other supporting structures, principally that of a shared Crown.

Recent historians have dwelt on the continuity of imperial unity after 1926.⁴ This interpretation is valid when applied to the new imperial unity which, apart from imperial unity under one Crown, was based on function. The actual practice flowing from the constitutional settlement, in the early years, meant that Britain assumed leadership for the Dominions in many areas. This new imperial unity, with its emotional and cultural undertones, was always liable to erosion. The unravelling of the juridical links at the heart of the Balfour Report of 1926, not least in the international dimension, was a vital departure which recent writers have perhaps underplayed. Emphasis on continuity, however, can mean overlooking the significance of the genuine severance which occurred between Britain and Canada with respect to foreign policy. In this regard, the constitutional settlement was a turning point particularly for Canada and the course of its foreign policy. Even though at this time, and in the immediate years which followed, Canada's foreign policy might be more precisely defined as an evolving 'personality' in international affairs, the constitutional settlement was, nonetheless, a moment when a genuine severance occurred between Britain and Canada in the area of foreign policy.

This study has concentrated on an analysis of British-Canadian relations and, specifically, Canada's break from formal diplomatic unity with Britain during the 1920s. The manner in which this unfolded has a significance especially for the study of Canada's emergence as an autonomous country. The interactions and dynamics which existed between Britain

and Canada during this process were in many ways unique. Each Dominion went through its own struggle to define its relationship with Britain. These struggles shared some similarities with the Canadian experience, but were not necessarily identical with it. Canada, therefore, must be analysed as something related to, but capable also of being abstracted from, the general run of Commonwealth developments.

That has been the aim of this thesis.

The constitutional settlement reached over these years did not mean that imperial unity was consigned to the past. An intimate, even unified, relationship continued to exist between Britain and Canada. However these imperial continuities may be described for other Dominions, in Canadian terms the unity which existed between Britain and Canada took on an informal bias with a tendency to become a purely conventional link between close partners. The years 1926 to 1928, therefore, retained a radical and even dramatic significance as a moment of separation between Canada and Britain, in terms of Canada's development as an independent state shaping its own destiny with its own distinctive outlook on the world. No longer could the British Government formally, or as a matter of status, exert control over Canadian affairs. Once British authority ceased, then Canada truly became autonomous and governed all its decisions and commitments. Imperial unity in status was over. The constitutional settlement critically modified imperial unity and placed it on a more permanent footing through the establishment of the Commonwealth. This new unity was one of function, in which Britain retained, for some time at least,

a substantial influence and leadership in how Canadian commitments were decided.

It is also important to recognise that this study purposefully examined one factor in the complex relationship between Britain and Canada. Emphasis was placed on the Foreign Office as opposed to other state departments involved, such as the Colonial Office and Dominions Office. Although this accentuation narrowed the scope of analysis, it enabled the study to highlight the particular pattern of evolution in the strictly diplomatic field. This approach also allowed close exploration of the Foreign Office, the department most directly affected by changes to imperial diplomatic unity. It was upon this foundation, laid during the 1920s, that Canada would build in time its independent foreign policy and subsequently expand its overseas legations.

Many years passed, however, before Canada exercised its right to have a plethora of separate legations and its associated authentic foreign policy of its own. In 1928, the growth of Canada's Department of External Affairs acquired apparent momentum with the establishment of two legations in Tokyo and Paris. No further expansion occurred, however, until after the Second World War. The department, moreover, did not gain full stature until 1948, nearly forty years after its establishment, when the Prime Minister ceased to act as the Minister of External Affairs and assigned the responsibilities to a separate minister. This belated emergence of Canadian diplomatic machinery, after having fought so persistently to control its own foreign policy, left Canada dependent upon the British Government's judgement in foreign affairs. It was in this de facto capacity that

Britain continued in practice, though not in law, to be the determining factor in Canadian external affairs. This informal diplomatic unity between the two countries - while modified by Canada's growing orientation towards the United States after 1940, as symbolised by the Ogdensburg Agreement⁵ - continued virtually uninterrupted through the Second World War. It may be said not to have completely collapsed until the Suez Crisis of 1956.

Canada's retreat back into the imperial fold in foreign affairs, after its efforts of the 1920s, meant that, until its expansion after the Second World War, Canada's foreign policy adopted more the aspect of a gradually evolving 'personality' than a full-fledged independent diplomacy. In function, during these years, Canadian and British foreign policies remained intrinsically linked. The autonomy that Canada secured by shaping its own international personality was a pre-condition for the development of an integrated, self-standing Canadian foreign policy.

The manner in which Canada became involved in the Second World War illustrates how in status Canada was distinct from Britain while in function the two countries remained closely linked. In 1914, when Britain declared war, it committed the Empire to war. Britain's declaration of war on Germany on 3 September 1939, however, did not automatically commit Canada to the conflict. The Canadian Parliament emphasised independence from Britain's announcement of war by delaying its own declaration of war on Germany by several days. The Canadian Parliament did not assemble to decide Canada's role until 7 September 1939. When the vote was taken, only five Members of Parliament opposed Canada's participation. On 9

September 1939, His Majesty, George VI, on the advice of his Canadian ministers, declared a state of war between Canada and Germany.⁶ Canada's action reflected Canada's legal independence from Britain. In function, however, Canada's action maintained the modified imperial unity established under the Statute of Westminster. In 1939, Britain was under threat from Germany. Canada was under no immediate physical threat and yet chose to go to Britain's aid immediately. Canada's decision represented not an imposition, but rather a rational and considered assessment by Canada's political leaders of national interests and national convictions.

Apart from the declaration of war in 1939, Canada's close involvement with the British war effort appeared to differ little from Canada's extensive participation in the First World War. When British-Canadian relations are examined from this perspective, it shows that following the constitutional settlement, Canada retreated back to the British diplomatic fold for almost two decades, and that while the two countries were independent of each other in status, they could be described as foreign countries in their dealings only in the narrowest sense.

As has been mentioned at various points in this study, one of the common threads to the developments of imperial relations in the 1920s was that at no point did events unfold in such a fashion that it became clear that the old imperial relationship had ceased and a new relationship had begun. Rather, while the new relationship was evolving it carried with it many aspects of the old imperial union. Nevertheless, in the sphere of politics and constitutions, more than in most areas of human relations, forms are vitally important, and

this account has emphasised that by 1928 the forms of Anglo-Canadian relations had changed in vital ways. British ministers no longer communicated with the Canadian Government through the Canadian Governor General. If Britain wished to present its interests to the Canadian Government then it was through the newly-appointed British High Commissioner. Also, in contrast to 1914 when Britain's declaration of war committed all of the British Empire, including Canada, to war, Britain no longer had this supreme quality of direction. By 1928, Canada was committed to British foreign policy, or indeed any international commitment, only when Canada chose to be committed. In this sense of international obligations, and above all in Canada's ability to make political choices of its own, Britain and Canada had become as foreign countries, in that it fell to each country to make its own decisions respecting its international involvement. Nevertheless, beyond the realm of international commitment and inter-governmental communications, the strong links and interactions in economical, political and cultural terms meant that Canada and Britain were unconventional foreign countries because their ties in function, though not in status, remained so close.

This study has, chiefly for the sake of clarity, labelled those who supported Canada's break from imperial diplomatic unity as nationalists and their opponents as imperialists. The label of nationalist remains clear with respect to examining Canada's break from imperial diplomatic unity. But the goals of nationalists did not extend specifically to the larger field of British-Canadian relations. In the broader context, Canada's sense of itself as a nation remained largely

undefined and is best characterised as fragile and complex. Two large cultural groups, one which drew a sense of identity from its French heritage and the other from its British heritage, had yet to reach a consensus on how Canada defined itself as a nation. Canada's still largely confused self-definition as a nation continued through the 1920s and beyond. For most of the English-speaking Canadians, Britain continued to be a strong cultural link, which was reinforced by political ties since the Canadian political structure was fashioned after the British model. Furthering the ties between Britain and Canada were economic links. These links kept the interactions extremely close for many Canadian regions such as the western provinces. These provinces had a predominantly agrarian-based economy which relied upon Britain in this period for their livelihood. Furthermore, this dependence increased during the depression of the 1930s.⁷ While in status Canada had complete control of all its affairs, internal and external, in substance the Canadian economy and foreign concerns still showed a heavy bias towards influence and guidance. In the rather hackneyed, but not perhaps inappropriate, metaphor of the family so often used in the Commonwealth context, Britain and Canada during the 1920s were like mother and daughter. After the constitutional settlement, they still remained extremely close but were now like two sisters, with the elder sister still assuming the leadership role when it mattered most.

It is only appropriate that a final word be said about the senior British figures whose participation in the events of the 1920s have dominated this study. Hindsight shows that Canada's severance from British imperial foreign policy

constituted a turning point in British-Canadian relations. Canada's gain of independent status in this respect was a prerequisite for the expansion of Canadian legations and foreign policy which later occurred. The gains which Canada made, however, were achieved with surprising ease and cooperation among senior British politicians such as Austen Chamberlain and L.S. Amery. The support of such British figures was not given in the belief that they were encouraging Canada's departure from the imperial fold. Not only would they have discouraged such an outcome, but the political opponents of these men would not have allowed such a policy to go unchallenged. The polemical debate which occurred in the British House of Commons at the time of the Statute of Westminster illustrated that British politicians were prepared to fight hard against any threat to imperial unity. The backing that men such as Chamberlain and Amery gave, in their capacities as Foreign Secretary and Dominions Secretary respectively from 1924 to 1929, was based on the conviction that they were assisting in the strengthening of imperial relations with Canada, and with other Dominions, by placing imperial unity on a new footing. These men recognised that the developments of the 1920s meant that Canada, and other Dominions, were assuming control in matters of status over what had once comprised imperial unity. They believed, however, that a new version of imperial unity was emerging, that of function, in which Britain would remain the leader upon whom the Dominions would rely and whose guidance they would follow. These senior British politicians distinguished between status and function and concluded that though unity in status might be lost, the continuance of unity in function

meant that in practice imperial unity would continue with little change. Senior officials in Whitehall also shared the conviction that imperial unity continued on, albeit under a different form. One strong supporter of the new form of unity was Maurice Hankey.

Hankey, Secretary to the British Cabinet, assisted Lord Balfour in reaching the necessary consensus required between Britain and the Dominions to produce the Balfour Report of 1926. Hankey, suggestively, regarded the report as a great success for the cause of continued imperial unity. Hankey was also showered with congratulations by many, including L.S. Amery, for his role in what was viewed as a great achievement.⁸ Publicly, Amery praised the Balfour Report, but in his diary he gave a more guarded view as to the ramifications of this report and the Imperial Conference of 1926. Amery concluded that much of what constituted imperial unity had been conceded to the Dominions. He believed, however, that the report and the conference had established a new imperial unity which possessed a promising future:

It [the Imperial Conference of 1926] really has been a great clearing up of outstanding points on the basis which eliminates friction and leaves the way clear for future co-operation. It is true it leaves the way equally clear for dissolution. That is a risk we have got to run and if the will to unity is there we shall overcome it. After all the best proof of the new spirit seems to be the fact that while the main committee of Prime Ministers was framing the new status policy all the various sub committees [sic] were hard at work, and not unsuccessfully, on detailed projects of closer co-operation, making up in sum total a far more effective series of bonds of Empire than the formal one we may have dropped.⁹

stauch British opponents to this line of thinking stated that it was impossible to disentangle status and function. These critics, as characterised by Winston Churchill's subsequent attack on the Statute of Westminster, argued that if status was conceded, then it always entailed the eventual loss of substance as well.¹⁰

In the years immediately after the constitutional settlement, British politicians who supported the settlement seemed to have disproved the gloomy predictions of their opponents. Canada did not expand its legations and it remained intrinsically linked with British foreign policy. Moreover, the ultimate test of unity - that of assistance at a time of war - was met by Canada's declaration of war on Germany soon after Britain's own declaration. Indeed, the unity which British supporters of the constitutional settlement envisioned between Canada and Britain continued in the realm of foreign policy until the Suez Crisis of 1956. In other areas, such cultural links, Britain and Canada preserved a unity for many years after 1956. In the longer view, of course, Canada's separation from Britain in foreign policy in status during the 1920s laid the foundation for Canada's ultimate emergence as a 'middle power', the definition and practice of which bore a vicarious relationship to the older imperial connection, and was even capable (as at Suez in 1956) of rejecting it outright. This study has sought to show that in so far as this branch of Empire-Commonwealth relations is concerned, Winston Churchill, and those who supported his line of thinking, were accurate in predicting that loss of status would eventually mean a loss of function as well.

1. British Parliamentary Papers, Cmd. 2768, 9.
2. Nicholas Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience, London, 1968, pp. 233-234.
3. A.B. Keith, Selected Speeches and Documents on the British Dominions, 1918-1931, Oxford, 1966, p. 189. The text given is a reprint of British Parliamentary Papers, Cmd. 3479, 60.
4. These historians include: I. Drummond, Imperial Economic Policy, 1917-1939: Studies in expansion and protection, London, 1974; R.F. Holland, Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance 1918-1939, London, 1981; and, Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience.
5. In July 1940, Franklin Roosevelt, President of the United States, met with Mackenzie King on the presidential train at Ogdensburg, New York. At this meeting, Roosevelt recommended the creation of a joint board of members from both countries, both civil and military, to discuss plans for the defence of the northern half of the western hemisphere. King agreed to the establishment of such a board. It was only after the fact that Churchill and the British Government learned of Canada's exclusive defence agreement with a foreign country. Donald Creighton, The Forked Road: Canada 1939-1957, Toronto, 1976, pp. 63-64, 119-120; C.P. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, vol. 2, Toronto, 1981, pp. 309-314.
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