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ROBERT BOTHWELL & JOHN ENGLISH

The view from inside out: Canadian diplomats and their public

Public responsibility has been for many years the stuff of ceremonial orations. 'Power,' one such oration proclaimed in 1905, 'involves duty. The privilege of citizenship imposes a certain responsibility ... In a democracy the great vice as well as the great danger is the indifference of the individual citizen.' Not very heady stuff, and not particularly uncommon either in 1905 or in 1984. What sets these words apart is less their content than their source, and the fact that their author, Robert Laird Borden, would eventually become Canada's prime minister and, in that capacity, the architect of Canada's first decade of foreign policy.[1]

For Borden and his generation, power and responsibility flowed from the ballot box – from the citizen to the politician or, as Borden would have wished, to the statesman. It was not that he confused the two, or that he forgot that the two roles often overlapped. As a practical politician, Borden veered to the idealist side as often as safety allowed; and as an idealist he occasionally permitted himself visions of what the future should hold – a future that involved dreams of a more perfect world, in which the public good became practical public policy, and public policy was supported by public opinion.

Canada was not an independent country in 1905. It had no foreign service, no foreign office, and no very great interest in

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1 Robert Craig Brown, *Robert Laird Borden* (2 vols; Toronto: Macmillan 1975), I, 103.

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overseas events, except as curiosities. Its prime minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, had grown up in a comfortable age of British garrisons and splendid isolation; shrewd observers suspected that Sir Wilfrid would have been happy to turn the international clock back to that earlier, easier, time. But foreign events kept bursting in on Sir Wilfrid's comfortable little world, and domestic voices kept insisting that he or his government do something to 'save' the British empire from itself, or Canada from the British empire.

These voices were annoyingly persistent. The most persistent belonged to Canada's small but determined band of imperialists – 'imperialists' in the sense that they wanted to strengthen the British empire through some unspecified plan of self-help and vigorous action, rather than in the modern and pejorative sense of that word. The imperialists constituted the first example of a foreign policy pressure group, and like other pressure groups since they spoke in the tones reserved for spokesmen for the people. The imperialists seldom got a full hearing from Laurier, but they were only too willing to bend the ears of visiting Britons touring Canada for signs of imperial enthusiasm. Public opinion sampling was admittedly crude: Sir George Drummond of Redpath's Sugar formed his view of Montreal opinion by noting, 'formerly few Union Jacks to be seen, now everywhere.' In the west, the young newspaper editor J.W. Dafoe had a different impression: 'National sentiment v. strong and growing.' In fact, Dafoe argued, 'Empire must become looser before it really coheres. Canada must get complete autonomy....' In support of 'complete autonomy' Dafoe, and others, could invoke 'national sentiment.' But who knew what national sentiment really was, or in what direction it was flowing?[2]

Anxious imperialists grouped themselves together in a loose organization called the Round Table. The Round Table movement has frequently been dissected by able and learned histori-

2 Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, Lothian Papers, 17/5, Philip Kerr, Diary of a trip to Canada in 1909.

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ans and we have no desire to repeat their efforts here. What should be stressed about the organization is that its members were on the whole young, well educated, and committed to a philosophy of public service. Older members or associates, such as the president of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, Sir Edmund Walker, financed their efforts and lent a hand with the recruitment of Canadian talent. On one occasion branch bank managers across the country were asked to select opinion leaders in their communities, surely the most bizarre foundation for a pressure group in Canadian history. It need hardly be said that the Round Table was élitist, but it should be added that its perception of public opinion was on the whole optimistic.[3]

Elitist political movements are unlikely to be able to offer mass support; for that they require plausible political allies, and in Canada it was generally held, so the Round Table was told, that 'the status of politicians and the character and intellect of politicians is low.' Still, the Round Tablers tried, and as their ally they tried to recruit none other than Robert Borden, by this time Sir Robert and prime minister of Canada, having disposed of Sir Wilfrid Laurier in the election of 1911. Sir Robert was spirited away to the heart of P.G. Wodehouse country in the English shires – always a favourite locale of the Round Tablers – and propositioned for the best part of a weekend on the advantages to himself and Canada of a closer and more tangible (meaning money) imperial connection. 'Impracticable,' Sir Robert growled to his diary at weekend's end, 'and any advantage too remote and indirect.' It was possibly the first time that a weekend foreign policy seminar had resulted in disappointment to one side and disillusion to the other, but it would not be the last.[4]

3 The most comprehensive study of the Round Table is John Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1975); the subject is also considered in Robert Bothwell, 'Loring Christie: The Failure of Bureaucratic Imperialism,' doctoral thesis, Harvard University 1972.

4 Public Archives of Canada (PAC), Ottawa, Robert L. Borden Papers, Diary, 12 July 1912.

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Despite the frustrations of Borden's meeting with the Round Tablers, his views and theirs on public opinion were not very far apart. Both subscribed to the proposition that public opinion was malleable or, better, educable. It was true that the ordinary agenda of politics kept the popular mind off the genuinely important issues of the day, so that it became necessary somehow to transcend politics itself. Borden, as a practical man, set a higher quotient on transcendence than did the more intellectual Round Tablers, but the theory – transformation through the abandonment of petty politics – was the same.

The First World War afforded an opportunity to test the anti-political hypothesis. As Borden put it in a speech in 1915: 'We rejoice that throughout the Empire men have realized most fully during the past twelve months that there is something greater than material prosperity, something greater than life itself ... [T]he character of a nation is not only tested but formed in stress and trial, through sacrifice and consecration to duty.'[5] Borden believed that the Canadian people would require some return on their sacrifice during the war and repeatedly urged the British government to concede greater Canadian autonomy or responsibility in the field of foreign policy on the grounds that public opinion would not settle for anything less. Public opinion, which was not kept abreast of Borden's initiatives, did not object; there is, however, no reason to believe that Borden was not sincere when he rang the changes on the popular will in his dealings with the British government.[6]

The culmination of Borden's efforts was, of course, Canada's presence at the Paris Peace Conference and its signature

5 Speech at the London Opera House, *ibid*, vol. 300, 175500-7.

6 See Bothwell, 'Christie,' for examples. One of the best is Borden's demand in November-December 1918 that Canada receive separate representation at the forthcoming Paris Peace Conference. Borden was informed by Newton Rowell, president of the Privy Council, that although Canada had less 'unsettled and critical ... public opinion' than other countries, Canadian opinion would not stand for the dominion's exclusion 'after all the sacrifices Canada has made.' Quoted in *ibid*, 168.

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on the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919. The previous month Borden found it expedient to come home – he had been abroad for ten months out of the previous twelve – and domestic business such as the Winnipeg General Strike demanded his authority and attention. Borden hoped to be able not merely to pass on the formal trappings of international responsibility to his fellow Canadians, but to reinforce in them the spirit of sacrifice and altruism that he believed the war had awoken. Behind him he had his cabinet and caucus, sufficient to pass the Versailles Treaty and with it Canadian membership in the League of Nations; but underneath them there was no particular constituency to which the prime minister could appeal for help and support in enlisting public opinion.

'My own feeling,' a western member of parliament told the House of Commons, 'is that this country and the world have had all the foreign policy they want for a number of years.'[7] Against this kind of carping remark Borden had few defenders. He did not even command the same support from opinion leaders or opinion makers that Woodrow Wilson had enjoyed south of the border, for in Canada external policy during the war had been the preserve of a very small number of officials and ministers. There was no systematic attempt after the war to open it up, but there was some hope, expressed in the September 1919 debate on the Versailles Treaty, that the Canadian people would view it both as the culmination of their wartime sacrifice and as a pattern for further, though lesser, involvement in foreign affairs.

Instead, Canadian officials sounding public attitudes found that the latter left a great deal to be desired. Sir John Willison, the London *Times* correspondent in Canada, told a political friend close to Borden that he found 'among many people some signs of weariness over questions which are not pretty closely related to our own domestic affairs. As a people we

7 The speaker was Dr Michael Clark of Alberta. Quoted in Roger Graham, *Arthur Meighen, A Biography* (3 vols; Toronto: Clarke, Irwin 1960-5), II, 67.

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hardly yet realize the meaning of a foreign policy.'[8] Granted, Willison's normal social contacts were not large or varied, but they included a fair section of the well-off or well informed in both Toronto and Ottawa.

Although there was a disposition to an activist foreign policy in some circles in Ottawa, it was becoming painfully obvious that such a policy could not be sustained. The indifference of cabinet ministers, members of parliament, editors of newspapers, not to mention their constituents and readers, to foreign affairs indicated that Borden and his successor, Arthur Meighen, would be unable to mobilize support for overseas expenditures or, worse still, any other kind of overseas commitment. Loring Christie, the source of much of Canada's external policy, blamed what he called 'the unlovely miasma' drifting up from the isolationist United States for an attitude which he summed up as '100% Canadian and the rest of the world be damned.' Under the circumstances Christie began to wonder whether he had much of a job to look forward to: 'I have a feeling,' he wrote in December 1919, 'that people are going to be recklessly absorbed in domestic business and impatient of anything else.'[9] Repeating himself a month later, Christie added wistfully, 'and I'd like to see something doing to keep the subject alive.'[10]

The 'something doing' involved the creation or extension of élite organizations interested in international affairs. Borden, Christie, and Newton Rowell were all founding members, in 1920, of the British Institute of International Affairs; in 1923 Christie would even be elected to its executive committee. Some Canadians involved in the BIIA also joined the Canadian League of Nations Society when it was established in 1921. Its object was to promote support for the League of Nations and in par-

8 PAC, Newton Rowell Papers, vol. 6, 4037, Sir John Willison to Rowell, 15 March 1920.

9 PAC, Loring Christie Papers, vol. 3, rough draft of Christie to Professor George Wrong of the University of Toronto, 30 December 1919.

10 Lothian Papers, Christie to Philip Kerr, 12 January 1920.

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ticular the League's collectivist ideals. Many of Canada's most prominent wartime leaders, including Borden, Rowell, and General Sir Arthur Currie, lent their names and influence to the society.[11]

There was a considerable overlap between membership in the new BIIA and that of the prewar Round Table. Lionel Curtis, the Round Table's pope, observed in 1923 that at the Paris Peace Conference 'it was clear that, as time went on, governments in their conduct of foreign affairs would come to rely more and more on the support of their citizens. The creation of an informed public opinion on international affairs was thus one of the prime needs of the future.' The trouble was, as some commentators pointed out, that the relationship between 'an informed public opinion' and real public opinion, as expressed through politicians and Parliament, was as wide as ever, and possibly wider.[12]

As Donald Page has argued, the leaders of the League of Nations Society were painfully conscious of the discrepancy between their ideals and their support and later, when the Canadian Institute of International Affairs was established, it tried to use the Society as the Institute's 'popular arm' – recognizing that it needed one.[13] Yet to gauge public opinion they could only rely on the crudest measurements: the calibre and attitudes of members of parliament elected every four or five years; the sensitivities of editors with particular purposes in mind, advertisers to satisfy, and circulation to boost; and conversations and correspondence with other eminent Canadians. These methods differed not at all from those used by Sir Wilfrid Laurier twenty years before; and they would remain in place for another twenty. Effectively, therefore, members of

11 On the origins of the CIIA and its connection with the BIIA, see Carter Manny, 'The Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1928 to 1939,' BA honors paper, Harvard College 1971, 2-8.

12 Curtis was cited in J.D.B. Miller, 'Commonwealth Institutes of International Affairs,' *International Journal* 33 (winter 1977-8), 6.

13 Donald Page, 'The Institute's "popular arm": the League of Nations Society in Canada,' *ibid*, 30.

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élite organizations had the opportunity – as did everyone else – to claim to speak for the people. Unfortunately for them, experience tended to disprove their claims, and no amount of concerted pressure could relieve the minds of contemporary politicians of the feeling that 'informed public opinion' was at best irrelevant and at worst positively dangerous to their electoral interests.

Arthur Meighen, in his brief space as prime minister in 1920-1, proceeded much as Borden had although, with domestic troubles looming, he had less time to devote to foreign affairs pure and simple. Proceeding to London in 1921 to attend an imperial conference, he took with him a reliable and intelligent newspaperman, Grattan O'Leary, to handle publicity. But Meighen was on the way out, and Canadians were unimpressed by his accomplishments in London; in December he and his government were swept away and replaced by the Liberals.

The new prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, was under no illusions about the relationship between foreign policy and public opinion. There was one, he knew, and it had helped to defeat his predecessor Laurier in 1911 and 1917. The linkage between foreign policy and electoral politics was therefore bad and dangerous, something to be avoided at almost all costs. As an intelligent man King knew that Canada could not avoid foreign entanglements, and he was willing to say so in private, and even to express personal opinions that were far from anodyne on the subject. But in public he preferred to say nothing.

King had good political reasons for lying low. He was, between 1921 and 1925, a comparatively young man in a cabinet with many mossbacks. The mossbacks held antique and politically imprudent opinions on the subject of foreign policy, preferring, on the whole, to leave it to the British. King knew that large sections of Canadian public opinion would never stand for that, and he solved the conundrum by doing precisely nothing. By doing nothing he could have been asserting the primacy of the British empire in foreign policy, as the moss-

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backs preferred, or refusing to contribute to the wild schemes of the British imperialists, as his French-Canadian supporters believed.

The cautionary lessons that King picked up from Liberal history, and from his own early experience as party leader, never left him, and they informed the official attitudes of the Department of External Affairs during his lengthy stewardship of that institution. He was assisted by a new under-secretary, O.D. Skelton, late of Queen's University, and eventually by a corps of youngish, well educated, and usually opinionated foreign service officers recruited from the universities in the late 1920s. Skelton had few illusions about the factious condition of Canadian public opinion. The tone of discussion in English Canada especially disturbed him although in the 1920s there was little that could bring it to a crisis. Later, as we shall see, Skelton became increasingly distressed by the potential clash between the several factions of Canadian popular opinion; he held out scant hope for a change either through education or through any impact of the course of world events. Only the passage of generations would transform public opinion into something more responsible or manageable. He would have approved the seventeenth-century Puritan aphorism, and added to it: when changing public opinion, 'stone dead hath no fellow.'[14]

In the prosperous and peaceful 1920s Skelton could afford to wait. With the arrival of a new decade, and with it depression and the renewed threat of war, time became a luxury. Increasingly, civil servants and other savants scrutinized public opinion for signs of change and, in the face of change, worried about the mechanisms that brought it about.

In 1933 the University of Chicago hosted a major international conference on the topic, 'The Formation of Public Opinion in World Politics.' The conference's stated purpose was to study public opinion 'not as climate but as weather.' The emphasis therefore fell upon the variations of the public mind

14 PAC, External Affairs Records, series D1, H.L. Keenleyside to O.D. Skelton, October 1938.

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'week by week, day by day, or even hour by hour.' Underlying this approach was a recognition that contemporary technological advances had eliminated traditional methods of social control and had led to new methods of controlling mass behaviour. These new methods had come to be described as propaganda, and they were in 1933 'a principal instrument of modern politics coordinate with violent and non-violent coercion and with tangible, economic inducements.' The tone so much reflected the times: the awareness of the irrational in politics, the fear of mass responses, and the knowledge that the intellectual foundations of democratic government were profoundly weakened.

The leading Canadian participant, J.W. Dafoe, the editor of the *Winnipeg Free Press*, understandably reflected this tone less than did the representatives from Germany and Western Europe whose remarks betrayed fears that the future was to justify. They emphasized the discontinuities with the past, as did scholars such as Harold Lasswell; Dafoe, however, pointed to continuities. He began his remarks by wondering whether he, 'the old man had been missing something, whether he had been asleep at the switch.' So much of the content of public life had changed and yet, in Dafoe's view, a great many characteristics of the political management of public opinion remained the same. The 'old flag' and 'the bloody shirt' were still pulled out with much effect whenever they seemed politically useful. What had changed, Dafoe admitted, was the complexity of society and of democracy: 'The road of democratic rule is not as straight as we had hoped it would be; it doesn't lead to pleasant pastures as rapidly as we had thought, and the light is not very good.' Dafoe's liberal progressivism had endured the ideological shocks of the depression. The pastures were more distant than was once believed, but eventually enlightened public opinion would guide Canadians toward them.[15]

15 Introduction and J.W. Dafoe, 'The formation of public opinion within the British empire,' in University of Chicago, Norman Wait Harris Memorial Foundation, *Proceedings* of a Conference on 'The Formation of Public Opinion in World Politics,' 19-22 June 1933, 1-2, 46-7, 60.

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Dafoe was more optimistic than most at the conference, but he was representative of other Canadians who also retained much of the old faith in the possibility of enlightened public opinion guiding democratic government. This belief animated the numerous Canadian businessmen and academics who participated in the Canadian Institute of International Affairs (CIIA) after its foundation in 1928 and in the work of the older and partisan League of Nations Society. Their study conferences, meetings, and research reports testified to a continuing belief in the possibility of enlightenment not only of public opinion but also of Ottawa bureaucrats.[16] The events of the 1930s had shaken their faith but had certainly not destroyed it. Had they known what reactions their efforts produced in the Department of External Affairs, their confidence would have been much weaker.

When Sir Maurice Hankey visited Canada in 1934 to ascertain its loyalty, he noted to his superiors in Britain the existence of the voluntary groups concerned with foreign policy. According to Hankey, these groups drew to their ranks 'extremists of all kinds – "highbrows", isolationists, French Canadians, Irish disloyalists, with a sprinkling of sound people who for one reason or another – sometimes because they know too much – take no leading part.' Hankey 'felt the utmost sympathy with Mr Bennett in a tirade he delivered to me against the Institute of International Affairs as a body that did nothing but harm and ought to be abolished.'[17] Mackenzie King's opinion was much the same. In King's view, such groups tried to usurp the tasks which properly belonged to political leaders. Their show of apparent expertise masked a profound political naïveté.

In 1935 King returned to power and to the position of secretary of state for external affairs. King's scepticism towards such groups as the CIIA arose from his belief that they meddled where they knew little. This might result in an agitated public

16 Manny, 'Canadian Institute,' 94-5.

17 Public Record Office (Kew), CAB 63/81, Sir M. Hankey, 'Impressions of Canada, December 1934.'

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opinion which could force hasty and foolish actions. Loring Christie, who returned to the Department of External Affairs as the second-ranking officer in 1935, held similar views in a more extreme form. The CIIA study conference in 1935 revolted him: 'As I listened and tried to envisage the real thing behind the facade of words, I had – never before so vividly – this kind of impression: that what they were really doing was sitting around the table as a General Staff planning for the next war.'[18] What appalled Christie was the lack of understanding of the nature of power among conference participants. He would have agreed with his American acquaintance, Walter Lippmann, who in the interwar years had hardened the views he had expressed in his classic 1922 study, *Public Opinion*. 'The public,' Lippman declaimed, 'must be put in its place so that it may exercise its powers, but no less and perhaps even more so that each of us may live free of the trampling and the roar of a bewildered herd.'[19]

In the later 1930s, Christie and Mackenzie King saw various herds stampeding wildly. Their task was to elude them and to avoid the agitation which caused the stampede. What Canadians thought about the impending war in Europe became a major concern for King and his colleagues, and for their critics. There were no public opinion polls, even though the science of polling was being introduced in North America. Without polls, there could only be speculation about the reaction of Canadians to the outbreak of a war in Europe in which Britain would be involved. In most cases, the speculation echoed what one believed should happen. This was certainly the case with academic isolationists who anticipated that Canada would come to its senses and not go to war. Mackenzie King and Ernest Lapointe were wiser. When war threatened in September 1938, King consulted immediately with his Quebec lieutenant who warned him that the situation in parts of Canada was 'extremely delicate.' Public opinion, Lapointe urged, 'will have

18 Christie to Lord Lothian, quoted in Manny, 'Canadian Institute,' 51.

19 Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New York: Harcourt Brace 1925), 155.

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to be prepared, not aroused by irrevocable steps.'[20] That was the path which King followed in the next year. He carefully nurtured ties with opinion leaders, but he avoided commitments. The opinion leaders were hopelessly divided; King as a political leader knew that he could not take sides. His strategy worked.

The strategy was effective but not very sophisticated, and it could not be maintained when war broke out in 1939. The Canadian government had lagged considerably behind the United States, Britain, and France, not to mention the totalitarian powers, in the development of agencies to shape public opinion. According to W.R. Young, the leading authority on wartime information programmes, the first major Canadian effort at systematically controlling the flow of information through the press occurred during the royal tour of 1939.[21] The great success of that tour encouraged the government to establish a Bureau of Public Information when war broke out. The government's inexperience, however, was soon apparent, and the bureau initially did little more than supply information to newspapers, and that, in the view of most Canadian newspapers, was the limit to which the Canadian government should carry on information activities. King himself was bothered by the notion that the government had a public information function, such functions being associated so closely with Dr Goebbels' nefarious work. In his diary he confessed his dislike of 'the publicity aspect of the business in connection with anything so grave as war – a sort of self advertising.'[22]

Several factors nevertheless led to the end of the limited approach to public information work. The first was the fall of

20 Quoted in H. Blair Neatby, *William Lyon Mackenzie King* (3 vols; Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1958-76), III, 291. On the academics, see J. Levitt, *A Vision Beyond Reach: A Century of Images of Canadian Destiny* (Ottawa: Deneau 1983), 112-14, 123.

21 W.R. Young, 'Making the truth graphic: the Canadian government's home front information structure and programmes during World War II,' doctoral thesis, University of British Columbia 1978, 1.

22 PAC, Mackenzie King Papers, King Diary, 17 January 1940.

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France and the sense of urgency which it created. Soon after France's fall, twenty 'concerned Canadians' met at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa to discuss what could be done to make the nation realize the peril of its situation. Three members of this group, E.A. Corbett, the director of the Canadian Association for Adult Education, Davidson Dunton, the editor of the *Montreal Standard*, and J.W. Pickersgill of the prime minister's office, wrote a memorandum which lamented the failure of the government's information programme and which pointed to new techniques which could be employed to improve national morale. The second factor was the growing awareness of techniques which could make the democratic war effort stronger. The persistent critiques of democracy in the 1930s had naturally given way to an appreciation of its value when its existence was threatened. Democracy became once more an end in itself, and its preservation a worthwhile goal. New social scientific methods, notably public opinion polling, would permit governments to know better what their citizens wanted, thus making democracy more effective by letting leaders understand the public. Conversely, leaders could use new methods, such as broadcasts and the documentary films then being pioneered by John Grierson at the National Film Board, to educate democratic publics in their responsibilities and opportunities. The complexities of wartime government and the extension of the state into areas where it had never touched before required, in Grierson's words, that governments 'exercise the power to inform and instruct the people on matters of state. Information services – propaganda if you like – follow inevitably in the wake of government initiative.'[23] Grierson was the architect of the approach that the Bureau of Public Information's successor, the Wartime Information Board, followed after its establishment in 1942. The third factor was the recognition by leading government members of the political usefulness of the new techniques of public information control and assessment. A young Liberal member of parliament, Brooke Claxton, had

23 Quoted in Young, 'Making the truth graphic,' 56.

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taken part in the Chateau Laurier discussions in 1940, and he had quickly recognized that social scientific approaches to the study of public opinion would be useful not only for the purposes of the war effort but also for the political needs of his party. The government needed help, and social science could provide it.

The polling of Canadians began in 1941. The Canadian Institute of Public Opinion, which was affiliated with George Gallup's organization in the United States, brought Gallup's techniques to Canada. It also carried out polls for the Wartime Information Board through its subsidiary, although the Information Board conducted its own polls too. The impact of polling upon the political system was immediate. The early polls revealed how divided the country was on many fundamental issues: conscription, labour, and political party choice. The rapid rise of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in the early polls probably attracted the most initial interest. The validity of the polls was confirmed by the CCF success in by-elections and in provincial elections. Politicians could now know what 'the people' thought; equally important, 'the people' themselves knew what they were thinking.

Public opinion polling had a definite impact upon the perception of pressure groups. Previously a pressure group could claim to represent what 'the public' thought on a particular issue. These claims could only be tested in an election, but elections featured so many issues that they rarely gave clear answers. With the advent of polling where specific questions could be asked, such as in the case of a Canadian loan to Britain or free trade with the United States, pressure groups could no longer make assertions as to what 'the people' believed. Polling subtly transformed the fashion in which pressure groups defined themselves. More than ever they had to justify their demands for influence on the basis of their peculiar moral or informational qualities. Sometimes politicians accepted these claims; usually they flattered them; often they simply ignored them.

In reality, polling tended to confirm the volatility of opin-

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ion, and the difference between 'opinion' which was short run and topical and 'attitudes' or orientations which were longer term or enduring. In interpreting survey results, politicians in the 1940s continued to regard the 'public' as differentiated, with some voices possessing more volume than others in creating the clamour to which politicians had to respond. King's diary reveals that he paid almost no attention to poll results. For King and for his colleagues, polls were, to use James Bryce's classic description of newspapers, 'weathercocks' which any prudent politician should occasionally glance at. It was up to the politician's intuition to tell him if the weathercock's direction had changed because of an idle gust or because of an impending storm. Polls were no more than this; they found no place in Mackenzie King's vest pocket.

The systematic analysis of public opinion through survey research was accompanied by studies of local communities which confirmed that some individuals' opinions mattered more than others. These studies, which were empirically based, offered support for Bryce's commonsense observation of 1888 that: 'In examining the process by which opinion is formed, we cannot fail to note how small a part of the view which the average man entertains when he goes to vote is really of his own making. His original impression was faint and perhaps shapeless; its present definiteness and strength are mainly due to what he has heard and read.'[24] The pioneering studies of American voting behaviour in the 1940s carried out by Paul Lazarsfeld and his associates highlighted the key role of personal influence in determining votes. The portrait they sketched was one of complexity, where qualitative assessments meant more than quantitative evidence, and where 'unending circuits of leadership relationships' ran through the community, 'like a nerve system through the body.'[25] The successful

24 James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (2 vols; New York: Macmillan 1888), II, 253.

25 Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (Glencoe IL: Free Press 1955), 525. The first major study was Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice* (New York: Duell 1944).

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politician was one who touched the right nerves and avoided the raw ones.

The leading individuals in the making of Canadian foreign policy from the mid-1940s through the Liberal governments of the 1950s were successful politicians. They shared the emerging social scientific view of the complexity of the concept of public opinion. Lester Pearson and Norman Robertson were among the 'concerned Canadians' who in 1940 had urged the government to manage public opinion more effectively through the use of new techniques. As under-secretary and later as secretary of state for external affairs, Pearson used traditional and modern methods to interpret and manage public opinion. He accepted that there were opinion leaders and that most of the population was indifferent to most questions of foreign policy. The electorate, however, had to feel that the nation's foreign policy reflected its general will, for only then could the policy-makers have the freedom that they needed. In his memoirs, Pearson pointed to the active information policy of his ministry and then added:

> While encouraging discussion based on knowledge and well-informed opinion, I often grew impatient with critics, the press, and other ostensible experts who argued that not only should the principles and broad lines of foreign policy be subject to the most searching debate and scrutiny before becoming accepted national policies, but that details of what was in hand at every stage of Cabinet or international discussions should be made public as they occurred.[26]

From 1946 until the mid-1950s Pearson had the freedom he wanted. He obtained a part of this freedom because of his skilful handling of the 'nerves' through which opinion passed and was directed.

Pearson cultivated closer relationships with newspapermen such as Bruce Hutchison, Grant Dexter, and Blair Fraser. In his memoirs, Hutchison recalls that Pearson 'would tell Dexter

26 L.B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson* (3 vols; Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1972-5), II, 34.

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and me the top secrets of the British and American governments, his conversations with a prime minister or a president, even military secrets which both of us promptly put out of our minds and wished we had not heard.'[27] One result of this practice may have been an inappropriate closeness between journalists and a politician. Another result was the best coverage of foreign policy issues that postwar Canada has seen.[28] Pearson and his colleagues maintained a close working relationship with the CIIA. The hostility which Ottawa exhibited privately towards the institute in the 1930s had given way to an era of remarkably good feelings. Indeed, the first three national secretaries of the institute, Escott Reid, John Baldwin, and John Holmes, became key decision-makers within the Ottawa bureaucracy. The institute became an important vehicle through which the department spoke to those relatively few Canadians who cared deeply about foreign affairs. Department officials broke their routines to attend study conferences, read manuscripts, and speak at branch meetings. The department encouraged the officials to co-operate, but as Alex Inglis has shown, Pearson and the department established clear limits upon the type of co-operation. When C.C. Lingard, the editor of the fledgling *International Journal*, asked senior department officials, including the minister, to write articles on Canadian foreign policy, his request was firmly refused. The department would assist independent contributors in writing articles on controversial subjects, but neither the department nor its members would take part in controversy.[29]

Pearson was the author of the department's policy towards the *Journal*. His attitude was fully consistent with his attitude towards the press and towards the academic community. He

27 Bruce Hutchison, *The Far Side of the Street* (Toronto: Macmillan 1976), 249. Grant Dexter's numerous memoranda (preserved in the Queen's University archives) confirm the accuracy of Hutchison's description.

28 The generally poor quality of coverage is discussed in Denis Stairs' fine article, 'The press and foreign policy in Canada,' *International Journal*, 31 (spring 1976), 223-43.

29 Alex Inglis, 'The Institute and the Department,' *International Journal*, 33 (winter 1977-8), 92-6.

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knew that the independence of reporters like Hutchison, academics like Fred Soward, and associated organizations like the Canadian Institute of International Affairs made their influence much greater. As they did at the United Nations, Canadian diplomats worked the corridors of Canadian academe and of the press clubs with consummate skill during the golden age of Canadian diplomacy. This was the domestic side of quiet diplomacy, and its effectiveness has been too rarely noted, perhaps because later generations became so soured after the experience of Vietnam. While the cultivation of such selected publics might strike some as élitist and far remote from the canons of participatory democracy, it is worth noting that this model of public opinion formation conformed closely with that which contemporary social science favoured.

The success of the 1940s and early 1950s, however, lay equally in the extent to which the general public, which was relatively uninformed about particular international issues, gave Canadian diplomats broad parameters in which to operate. 'Public opinion,' Pearson declared in 1954, 'must ... be convinced that, even if its representatives in government are to be given – as I think they should – room to manoeuvre in negotiation, they will not abandon any principle that has been laid down to guide such negotiation.'[30] It was so convinced. Public opinion polls revealed strong support for those policies which the St Laurent government promoted: alliance with the Americans, active membership in the Commonwealth, and commitment to the United Nations. In Denis Stairs' view, the Canadian government at that time did not experience 'any significant sense of domestic confinement' in its alliance policy.[31] In the 1960s, however, this freedom vanished, as the model of public opinion formation which policy-makers effectively used in the so-called golden age proved inadequate as a guide.

There is considerable disagreement on the extent to which

30 L.B. Pearson, *Words and Occasions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1970), 127.

31 Denis Stairs, 'Public opinion and External Affairs: reflections on the domestication of Canadian foreign policy,' *International Journal*, 33 (winter 1977-8), 132.

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foreign policy issues played a role in ending the 'golden age' in 1957. It is certainly true that the Canadian government's policy of supporting United Nations action at the time of the Suez crisis of 1956 or its apparent encouragement of American promoters in the transportation of Canadian gas were prominent issues in the election that brought John Diefenbaker and his Conservatives to power. Like Pearson, Diefenbaker regarded public opinion as a force which a successful politician could mould. Unlike Pearson, Diefenbaker sought to speak over the heads of the 'opinion leaders' directly to the people. He tried to engage their emotions by lavish use of symbols and rhetoric.

Diefenbaker, the man of the people, frequently met people – people of all kinds, as he liked to think. The accumulation of personal contacts and the inflow of correspondence that crowded his in-basket seem to have defined his view of public opinion on various issues. Curiously, it was his apparently more intellectual, more statesmanlike opponent, Lester Pearson, who read the public opinion polls and noted that on the issue of nuclear weapons popular opinion was swinging against the government.

The consequences are, again, well known. In the 1963 election the Liberals had a winning issue in their support for Canada's acquisition of nuclear weapons for its NATO forces and air defence missiles; Diefenbaker, proclaiming that his hand was on the popular pulse, failed to note that his patient was having convulsions.

Pearson expected to return Canada to the smoothly functioning diplomacy of the mid-1950s. It was not to be. He found, instead, 'the trampling and roar of the bewildered herd.' He tried to stay in front of the herd, but it was always catching up. Most of the time he took refuge in a policy of obfuscation of which his mentor and sometime master, Mackenzie King, would have been proud. On those occasions when Pearson spoke out, however, he found to his dismay that he had only increased the din and confusion. It was not the end of fascination with public opinion, and it was certainly not the end of illu-

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sions on the subject. Pearson's successor, on his accession in 1968, immediately attempted to discover what the public felt; it was only then, perhaps, that he found that the public had surprisingly little to say. The canons of participatory democracy crumbled quickly when applied to foreign policy, and Canadian diplomats sought out their 'public' anew.

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