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# The Middle Power Project



*Adam Chapnick*

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The Middle Power Project:  
Canada and the Founding of  
the United Nations



**UBC**Press · Vancouver · Toronto

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15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in Canada on acid-free paper

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### Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Chapnick, Adam, 1976-

The middle power project : Canada and the founding of the United Nations / Adam Chapnick.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 13: 978-0-7748-1247-4

ISBN 10: 0-7748-1247-8

1. United Nations – Canada – History – 20th century. I. Title.

FC242.C48 2005 341.23'71'09044 C2005-904338-5

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## Canada

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP), and of the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Printed and bound in Canada by Friesens

Set in Stone by Artegraphica Design Co. Ltd.

Copy editor: Robert Lewis

Proofreader: Dianne Tiefensee

UBC Press

The University of British Columbia

2029 West Mall

Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

604-822-5959 / Fax: 604-822-6083

[www.ubcpres.ca](http://www.ubcpres.ca)

*To Erica*



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# Acknowledgments

Erica Berman's love and support are the driving force behind any successes that I have had over the past five years.

The Chapnick and Berman families were also there whenever I needed them, and the Rossman family provided the most wonderful home away from home while I was in Ottawa. Robert Bothwell's detailed and thorough comments and suggestions on an earlier version of the manuscript made it much better than it ever could have been otherwise. Few will ever know as much about Canadian history as he does. Bob Accinelli was utterly reliable when I had questions on American foreign policy, and Bill Young provided access to his own personal papers, which helped to shed light on some of the personalities of the day. William Walker and John English also provided particularly helpful comments on an earlier version of the manuscript. Marilyn Laville answered more phone calls and e-mails than I care to remember and remained positive and accommodating no matter what I asked. Kathy Rasmussen was a wonderful office companion in the early years of this project and set an example of how senior PhDs should treat their juniors. Mike Carroll was the most helpful person with whom I spoke about travel and accommodations for research trips. Urs Obrist went above and beyond the call of duty in translating the Stipernitz thesis. Judith Robertson not only granted me an interview and access to her own papers, but also connected me with others who were able to help with my research. She and June Rogers provided me with a sense of their fathers that I could not have found anywhere else and have remained helpful supporters ever since I first met them. Brian Horgan was a better host than anyone could have asked for while I was in London. Norman Hillmer came through as he always has, and I cannot imagine ever having finished this book without his reassuring words and e-mails. Finally, Emily Andrew has been an exceptional editor. She and the rest of the staff at UBC Press are models of efficiency and professionalism. Working with them has been a privilege.

The research for this book was made possible by an unbelievably helpful group of support staff and archivists, including: Louise Nugent, Jennifer Francisco, and the rest of the staff in the History Department, University of Toronto; Heather Home and the Queen's University Archives staff; Karen Rohan at the Library of the American Foreign Policy Association; Gayle Fraser and Jennifer McNenly formerly of the Library of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs; Apollonia Steele and Marlys Chevrefils at the University of Calgary Library, Special Collections; Richard Virr at McGill University Library, Special Collections; the staff at Library and Archives Canada (particularly the circulation crew, who are polite, professional, and amazingly patient); the staff at the University of Toronto Archives; Henry Pilon at Trinity College Archives (Toronto); the staff at Robarts Library, University of Toronto, in Resource Sharing, Data, Maps, and Government Documents and in the Microform Reading Room; Pat Molesky and the staff at the Glenbow Museum Archives in Calgary; National Archives of England, Wales, and the United Kingdom; Christine Penney and the staff at the University of Birmingham Library, Special Collections; Corinne Miller, Helen Lafleur, Jane Boyko, and the staff at the Bank of Canada Archives in Ottawa; the staff at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland; the staff at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Michele Dale and the staff at the Archives of Ontario; Jude Brimmer and the staff at the Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge; Oliver House and the staff at the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the staff at the Durham University Library, Archives and Special Collections; Robert Clark and the staff at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park; Ramona Kohrs at the Dag Hammarskjöld (United Nations) Library, New York; and the staff at the Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton.

I would also like to thank the master and fellows of Massey College for permission to consult the Vincent Massey Papers; Robert Bothwell for permission to consult the Robert Selkirk Bothwell Papers; Lady Avon for permission to consult the Avon Papers; Graham Fraser for permission to consult the Blair Fraser Papers; William Young for access to his personal papers; the Bank of Canada for access to the Louis Rasminsky Papers; James S. Hutchison for access to the Bruce Hutchison Fonds; Lord Halifax for permission to cite from the Halifax Papers; and Judith Robertson for access to her personal papers; and Julia Matthews for permission to cite from the James Gibson interview.

Money for the research for this book was provided by: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council; Massey College through the Jack and Rita Catherall and Evelyn Catherall Travel Scholarships (two awards); the University of Toronto Centre for International Studies through the Sir Val

Duncan Travel Grant (two awards); the University of Toronto School of Graduate Studies through the Associates of the University of Toronto Travel Award/SGS Travel Grant; the Department of History, University of Toronto; and the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute Grants Program.



# Acronyms

AIPO	American Institute of Public Opinion
AO	Archives of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
APOP	Australian Public Opinion Poll
BCA	Bank of Canada Archives, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
BL	Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Oxford, UK
CAAE	Canadian Association for Adult Education
CAB	Cabinet Office Papers
CAC	Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CCEC	Canadian Council for Education in Citizenship
CCF	Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations
CIIA	Canadian Institute of International Affairs
CIPO	Canadian Institute of Public Opinion
<i>DCER</i>	<i>Documents on Canadian External Relations</i>
DEA	Department of External Affairs
DHL	Dag Hammarskjöld Library, United Nations, New York, USA
DO	Dominions Office (Papers)
DUL	Durham University Library, Archives and Special Collections, Durham, UK
ECOSOC	(United Nations) Economic and Social Council
EPA	Empire Parliamentary Association
FDRL	Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, USA
FO	Foreign Office (Papers)
<i>FRUS</i>	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
<i>G&amp;M</i>	<i>Globe and Mail</i>
IPR	Institute of Pacific Relations
ISO	(US) Division of International Security and Organization
LAC	Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

LC	Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, DC, USA
MHF	Records of the Office of European Affairs (Matthews-Hickerson File) 1934-47
MP	member of Parliament
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland, USA
NAUK	National Archives of England, Wales, and the United Kingdom, Kew, UK
NFB	National Film Board
PCO	Privy Council Office
PHP	post-hostilities problems
POQ	<i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i>
PSF	President's Secretary's Files
QUA	Queen's University Archives, Kingston, Ontario, Canada
RIIA	Royal Institute of International Affairs
SML	Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton, New Jersey, USA
SS	Secretary of State
SSDA	Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs
SSEA	Secretary of State for External Affairs
UBSC	University of Birmingham Library, Special Collections, Birmingham, UK
UN	United Nations (Organization)
UNCIO	<i>Documents of the United Nations Conference on International Organization, San Francisco, 1945</i>
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UT	University of Toronto Archives, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
UTTC	University of Toronto, Trinity College Archives, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
WCA	World Citizens Association
WFP	<i>Winnipeg Free Press</i>
WIB	Wartime Information Board

# 1

## Introduction

We are a conservative and steady people, hardly daring to believe in our own capacity in the more complex affairs of statecraft, afraid to test that capacity too far with new systems and experiments ...

We are among the few peoples still in the first throes of collective growth ... We have, every one of us, the feeling that we are involved in a process of perpetual expansion, development and revision, whose end we cannot see.

We have the feeling, not of an old and settled resident in his father's house, but of a young man building a new house for himself, without any clear plan in his head and wondering how large his future family will be ...

If this is not yet a rounded and settled national character, it is, assuredly, the soil out of which a character is growing as surely as a boy grows into a man. It has grown these last few years faster than we have stopped to realize.<sup>1</sup>

– Bruce Hutchison

With these words, the Canadian journalist Bruce Hutchison captured the spirit of a country entering one of the most profound periods of change in its history. When the Second World War began, Canada was governed by a prime minister who was afraid of international commitments and an undersecretary of state for external affairs with neutralist, if not isolationist, tendencies. While technically independent, Canada was considered by the international community to be a British dominion lacking a foreign policy

of its own. Over the next five years, Canada became a self-proclaimed middle power and an active, enthusiastic participant in the creation of the most recognized symbol of internationalism of its time: the United Nations Organization (UN). Forced by a brutal war to abandon their ambivalence toward the world outside of North America, Canadians reinvented themselves as concerned and responsible global citizens. They learned that security meant more than just military strength yet were still able to acknowledge the importance of harmony between the great powers to a stable international system.

There has yet to be a thorough, published account of Canada's contribution to the founding of the UN, but a number of writers have considered the national postwar planning process more generally.<sup>2</sup> Some, like the former diplomat turned commentator John Holmes, have been relatively guarded in their enthusiasm for their country's achievements: "We did our homework in post-hostilities planning," he wrote, "and consequently we had about as much influence on the nature of the UN Charter as a country of our size could approximately expect even though we had, of course, to accept a scheme designed to a large extent by the great powers."<sup>3</sup> Others have been less reserved, attributing to Canada "considerable influence"<sup>4</sup> and noting how it had become "richer, immeasurably more powerful, confident and armed to the teeth both with righteousness and the weapons of war."<sup>5</sup> On the whole, regardless of their initial hesitations, most analysts agree that the establishment of the United Nations changed, and indeed improved, the character of the modern world – and Canadians along with it.

But in their haste to celebrate what was new, many of these writers have neglected to recognize how much of the old remained. The charter that emerged from the San Francisco Conference in June 1945 was neither perfect nor radically different from the old Covenant of the League of Nations. One international commentator later explained: "The founding fathers of the United Nations were realistic enough to accept the necessity of operating within the confines of the existing power structure and to recognize the grave dangers of future conflict among the superpowers."<sup>6</sup> The charter, wrote another, was "a political document compounded by practical politicians who compromised on many contentious issues and produced a paper which, while satisfactory to nobody on all points, had obtained the approval of at least two-thirds of all delegations for every paragraph."<sup>7</sup>

The changes that took place within Canada have also been romanticized. The Canadian general public, which had previously shown virtually no interest in international relations, did indeed begin to advocate a greater role for its government in the new world order. And Canada certainly was an active and founding member of the United Nations. It was not, however, the leading middle power that so many have made it out to be. Because national histories have fixated so intently on "the Canadian preoccupation



with Canada's place in the world, a preoccupation with status, position, influence and power,"<sup>8</sup> they have consistently overestimated the country's international standing when the Second World War came to a close. In the case of the United Nations, they have focused almost exclusively on the period from 1943 through 1945, overlooking the lack of Canadian involvement, and by extension influence, in the earlier years.<sup>9</sup>

Between 1939 and 1941, while officials in Great Britain and the United States quietly cooperated with interested nongovernmental organizations to create the bureaucratic infrastructure necessary to design a new world order, their colleagues in Ottawa showed virtually no interest in postwar planning. There were individuals in groups such as the Canadian Institute of International Affairs (CIIA) who did take reconstruction questions seriously, but until 1942, or even 1943, they had no legitimate political outlet for their concerns.

In 1942 the Canadian government was unaware that its great-power allies had begun to formalize their visions of the general structure of the next world organization. It was therefore difficult for proponents of greater internationalism to convince their prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, to move ahead aggressively with a national planning exercise. A leading civil servant stationed outside of Ottawa, Hume Wrong, was more forward-thinking. In January 1942 he conceived what has since become known as the functional principle. This theory of international representation was originally developed to ensure that during the war, states with the capacity and willingness to contribute positively would receive influence commensurate with their contribution. From the principle's inception, however, Wrong and his closest colleagues knew that Canada's brand of functionalism – one that had been developed by diplomats rather than by soldiers – would be more applicable to discussions of the future peace.

The functional principle was tested in this future context in 1942 and 1943 during negotiations to establish the first global postwar organization, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). The original composition of the UNRRA executive set a precedent for the structure of the United Nations, and the results of the UNRRA meetings therefore mark Canada's first direct involvement in the shaping of the postwar world. Throughout the negotiations, poor coordination and miscommunication among the country's top officials and political leaders resulted in a decision to compromise the functional principle and put its future usefulness as a foreign-policy tool into question. The outcome of the UNRRA planning meetings should therefore be seen as a failure, indicative of the country's lack of worldly experience.

Already suffering in the polls after a divisive national debate over conscription and seeking to respond to accusations at home and in the United States that Canada had not been contributing its fair share to the war,

Mackenzie King's Liberal government had no choice but to become more comfortable with international engagement as the UNRRA talks progressed. In 1943 when the newly instituted Wartime Information Board informed the prime minister that the Canadian people were now seriously interested in postwar reconstruction, he grudgingly allowed his staff in the Department of External Affairs to contribute to the formal planning exercises then taking place in the United Kingdom. Thanks to its British ties, its close relationship with the United States, and its political, economic, and military investment in the war, Canada was invited to join these postwar discussions well before any other nongreat power. Consequently, the six month period that followed the end of the UNRRA negotiations saw the extent of Canada's relative influence in shaping the new world order reach its peak. King was privy to confidential Anglo-American planning ideas before the rest of the small-power leaders, and Canada's impact on the Moscow Conference of October 1943 justified proclamations both in the media and on Parliament Hill that the country had begun to function as the foremost representative of the intermediate and small states.

After Moscow, as it became more obvious that the United States had replaced Great Britain as the dominant power in the West and that London would need the support of the dominions to maintain its international legitimacy as a world leader, an increasingly confident national public questioned Canada's proper role within the British Commonwealth of Nations. This was an important issue that would enshrine the concept of helpful fixer in the Canadian national mentality and allow the King government to assume a more independent position on the world stage, but it was also an all-consuming issue in late 1943 and early 1944. Discussions about the old empire overwhelmed the public, the press, the academic community, and Parliament, while officials in the United Kingdom and the United States were finalizing their first drafts of the UN Charter. Their results, arrived at with only minimal input from Canada, were not that different from the document that eventually emerged from San Francisco.

In the summer of 1944, while the great powers formally discussed their visions of the future at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference, Canadian officials did a particularly poor job of making certain that their government's opinions were heard and taken seriously. This disappointing performance was the result primarily of the inability of the country's most important planners to reconcile their conflicting approaches to conceiving a new world order. When officials Lester Pearson and Escott Reid refused to heed their superiors' warnings to negotiate cautiously, Norman Robertson and Hume Wrong denied them access to information that they needed to perform effectively at the Canadian Embassy in the United States. This conflict between the aggressive internationalists in Washington and the cautious pragmatists in Ottawa has generally been underemphasized by Canadian

historians, just as it was never acknowledged or managed by Mackenzie King, who was also the minister of external affairs.

Instead, most of the importance traditionally assigned by Canadian analysts to the period leading up to the San Francisco Conference is associated with the development of the amorphous middle power concept. Canada, among others, vaguely demanded that a distinction be made on the world organization's executive committee – the United Nations Security Council – between the moderately powerful states, like itself, and the utterly powerless. Once again, the Canadian negotiators were unsuccessful. It was simply too difficult to devise reasonable and widely acceptable criteria by which to differentiate among the nongreat. Moreover, as a country that was still relatively new to world affairs, Canada lacked the bureaucratic infrastructure and the resources necessary to develop a network of like-minded medium-sized states that might have worked together to achieve this end.

The more optimistic civil servants, like Pearson and Reid, were hardly deterred, and the national press certainly continued to promote Canada as the leader of the secondary countries, but the most significant Canadian contribution to the new world organization eventually came from those who had all but abandoned the middle power project. In early 1945, led once again by Hume Wrong, officials in the East Block<sup>10</sup> involved in the UN negotiations turned their thoughts to an issue of international order closer to Mackenzie King's heart: the impact of social and economic stability on world peace and global security. Accompanying this new focus was the belief that, for the United Nations to be successful, the great powers – then the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, China, and France – would have to be allowed to dominate the more traditional security field.

Thus, while most Canadians anticipated that their country would make its greatest impact at the San Francisco Conference by defining a role for the middle powers and establishing the functional principle as a basis for determining representation on international bodies, Canada's best opportunity for real influence lay in the socio-economic arena. Thanks to its effective preparation and genuine commitment, the Canadian delegation was successful in rewriting and expanding the articles in the Dumbarton Oaks proposals that defined and characterized the new organization's Economic and Social Council. Other initiatives ended less positively. The concept of functionalism was only partly included in the new charter. And the middle power campaign ended before it began. At San Francisco it was not a Canadian but rather Australia's foreign minister, Herbert Evatt, who led the smaller states in a drive to reduce the influence of the great powers. During the negotiations, the representatives from Ottawa were in fact complicit in ensuring that the veto power granted to the United Kingdom, the United States, the Soviet Union, China, and France was further-reaching than many of their colleagues from the medium- and smaller-sized countries would have

preferred. Caution clearly ruled under Mackenzie King: international prestige was not worth the risk of another great-power conflict.

Their initial optimism now tempered by increasing tensions between the Western allies and the Soviet Union, most Canadian participants acknowledged the results of the United Nations Conference on International Organization to be a wake-up call. It was time to accept that their country was a small, albeit independent and active, nation on the world stage. It could have an impact on international issues that did not require a substantial military commitment, but in a Cold War environment, when it came to security, the will of the great powers reigned supreme. For the great majority of the Canadian delegation, the process that would lead to what one historian has called “the destruction of the idealist impulse in Canadian life”<sup>11</sup> was all but over.

It was not over for those who had followed the conference through the press. Politicians, academics, journalists, and those few officials who managed to maintain some of their idealism viewed the San Francisco experience as evidence of Canada’s new, elevated place in world affairs. They spoke and wrote wistfully of their country’s position as a middle power leader and trumpeted Canada’s half-triumphs at the negotiations as complete victories. For them, as the late historian C.P. Stacey has explained, Canada was “the centre of the world.”<sup>12</sup> They interpreted changes that had taken place internally as international achievements.

This was an understandable response, one that is common historically among peoples who have committed themselves to a new national identity and have then proceeded to try to “bring reality into alignment with their vision.”<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, it has resulted in a consistent overstatement of Canada’s importance to the planning of the United Nations during the Second World War. As a small state undergoing “a profound period of apprenticeship in the trade of international relations,”<sup>14</sup> Canada was on the periphery during what were primarily great-power negotiations. In well over its head and coming to grips with an expanded role in the international community for which it had not asked, Canada’s successes on the world stage were relatively minor. None of this diminishes the importance to Canadian history of the process of founding the United Nations. Rather, instead of assessing the significance of this period in terms of how Canada changed the world, it is time to consider more carefully how planning a new world order changed Canada.

## 2

# Two Steps Behind (Beginnings through January 1942)

When it came to peacemaking, William Lyon Mackenzie King was a natural. His upbringing, his religion, and his education had made him a strong believer in faith, hope, and human reason. He applied these values to his academic training and eventually received a PhD from Harvard recognizing the quality of his research on labour negotiation and social reform. From 1914 to 1917 he consulted for the Rockefeller Foundation, quickly becoming one of the world's foremost experts on mediation and conflict resolution.

In 1918, writing in the shadows of the First World War, he published his only significant scholarly work, *Industry and Humanity*. It was meant to be a discourse on the future of industrial relations, but its promotion of negotiation and conciliation as means of conflict resolution was equally relevant to the management of global affairs. International conflict, King reasoned, was just like industrial strife, and “the acceptance of nations of the principle of investigation before resort to hostilities would mark the dawn of a new era in the history of the world.”<sup>1</sup> These thoughts were hardly original – at this precise moment, the American president, Woodrow Wilson, was trying to embody them in the League of Nations Covenant – but they were sincere, and King carried them with him throughout his tenure as Canada's prime minister and minister of external affairs.

Where King and Wilson differed was on the value of formal international organizations. To the Canadian, problems were best solved by people, not structures, and conciliation “was always the best of methods to employ in adjusting differences.”<sup>2</sup> King was also not a deep student of international events; maintaining domestic harmony concerned him far more than his country's involvement abroad. Nevertheless, he was Canada's leading political figure and could not always avoid thinking about his global responsibilities. A confidential contemporary biographical sketch of the prime minister, likely from the late 1930s or the early 1940s, listed his interpretation of these duties as threefold: “to gain and maintain Canada's

recognition as an independent unified nation bound to the Commonwealth only by ties of loyalty to the Crown; to support Great Britain and the Empire in bad days as well as in good, but to do so because it is in Canada's best interest; and finally to promote close friendship between Canada and the United States and thus a closer understanding between the United States and Great Britain."<sup>3</sup>

This tempered approach to foreign policy reflected the generally ambivalent attitude toward international affairs and world order shared by much of the Canadian public into the early 1940s. When the war began, the electorate was still recovering from the strains of the conscription controversy of 1917 and from the economic and social impact of the Great Depression. Canadians sought comfort in the so-called fireproof house of North America and did not pay attention to talk of a new international organization to replace the old and ineffective League of Nations. It is therefore not surprising that King saw little need to contemplate the potentially controversial postwar peace during the first years of the Second World War.

His great-power allies in the United Kingdom and the United States were thinking differently. The failure of the League of Nations had demonstrated to them the need for a new, workable framework for international organization, and they started to devise strategies for postwar reconstruction before the formal conflict with Hitler had even begun. It was not until 1941, under new administrative leadership and with the national war effort expanding, that Canada's Department of External Affairs was given King's grudging permission to begin to catch up. By then Canadian officials were clearly starting from behind.

While Mackenzie King might not have cared for the idea of a new world organization, a number of other educated Canadians, who formed part of what the historian Douglas Owram has called the national "brain trust," felt differently.<sup>4</sup> Most of them were members of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs (CIIA). Founded in 1928 as a sister organization to Britain's Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA), it aimed to promote a greater general awareness of international problems, particularly with reference to Canada and the British Empire. Since, as one scholar has explained, in the 1920s and the 1930s, "the CIIA's membership comprised virtually everyone in Canada interested in foreign policy in a serious way,"<sup>5</sup> CIIA activists were often affiliated with other bodies committed to internationalism and collective security. Members could be found, for example, at meetings of both the League of Nations Society and the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE).

On 20 November 1940 a number of CIIA leaders, including Brooke Claxton, who was an affiliate of the League of Nations Society and a Liberal backbencher, E.A. Corbett of the CAAE, the Canadian film commissioner,

John Grierson, and the University of New Brunswick president, Norman Mackenzie, attended an informal conference of educational authorities. The next day, the foursome helped found the Canadian Council for Education in Citizenship (CCEC). The CCEC had two main objectives: "To stimulate in the minds of all Canadians a greater appreciation of the meaning and implications of democracy as a way of life" and to promote a greater understanding of the challenges of postwar reconstruction both at home and abroad.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the war, the council collaborated with a variety of governmental and nongovernmental agencies to help shape public opinion and to promote a more internationalist approach to Canadian external relations. In 1940, however, most of its work was restricted to the voluntary sector; access to the official body responsible for foreign-policy development, the Department of External Affairs, was either limited or nonexistent. Part of the problem was the undersecretary of state for external affairs, O.D. Skelton. He was, like King, a Presbyterian, a first-rate academic with a PhD in political economy, and a liberal at heart. He shared his prime minister's suspicions of Britain's political leadership and had never forgotten that following the British blindly into battle in 1914 had nearly destroyed his country. In the late 1930s, while Hitler moved on Austria and Czechoslovakia, Skelton became the leader of "the isolationist intelligentsia" in the East Block. He argued incessantly that Canada would not survive entrance into another European conflict. By implication, there was no reason to seriously contemplate the peace that might follow.<sup>7</sup>

Not all of Skelton's staff shared his views. Most of the young, well-educated, forthright nationalist intellectuals whom he hired to serve beneath him between 1925 and 1940 envisioned Canada as an active player in world affairs and, over time, as a significant contributor to the Allied cause in the Second World War. Nevertheless, under their leader's shadow, they generally kept their desires for a more dynamic policy to themselves.

For the most part, this system worked effectively. One recruit, Charles Ritchie, recalled his first impressions of the office in 1934: "The Department of External Affairs at that time was as small as Canada's place on the map of international politics. Its future was being shaped by a handful of unusually gifted men ... They worked together without feeling for respective rank, without pomposity, with humour, desisting pretence, intolerant of silliness and scathing in their contempt for self-advertisement."<sup>8</sup> Thanks in large part to Skelton's leadership, this atmosphere of youthful enthusiasm and general cohesiveness remained intact through the first sixteen months of the Second World War.

On 28 January 1941, however, the sixty-two-year-old undersecretary, who had been coping with relatively serious heart trouble for years, suffered a fatal heart attack in his car on his way back to the East Block from lunch.

His passing was a tremendous blow to Mackenzie King, who trusted him more than he did any other civil servant, and to the Canadian policy establishment as a whole. The Department of External Affairs was particularly hard hit. One officer later recalled: "He was the firm foundation of our department, at home and abroad. He was more. He was the centre of all its decisions and of many of those of the government. He appeared to be irreplaceable." And he had never had the time to develop or mentor a successor.<sup>9</sup>

The selection of the next undersecretary marked a turning point in the history of Canadian external relations and, more specifically, in Canada's approach to shaping the future world order; with Skelton gone, so too was the most significant long term impediment in Ottawa to constructive post-war planning. According to the historian John Hilliker, the process of choosing a replacement was basically one of elimination. Assistant Undersecretary Laurent Beaudry did not want the position; the legal adviser John Read lacked the required background in politics and economics; Hugh Keenleyside, who had worked in the legation in Japan and had also recently served as King's personal emissary in discussions with the United States, was a difficult political choice because of his unpopular defence of the interests of Canada's Japanese. That left three of Skelton's best recruits from the 1920s: Oxford graduates Hume Wrong, Lester (Mike) Pearson, and Norman Robertson.<sup>10</sup>

A professor of history at the University of Toronto and the son of its founding historian, Hume Wrong was best known for his superior intellect. After his death in 1954, one colleague recalled fondly: "It was his capacity for bold, dispassionate and objective thinking and of following through to whatever his trained rational processes of thought and experience would lead him, despite the pressures and distractions of the day, that made Hume Wrong such a tower of strength in those days of diplomatic pioneering for Canada."<sup>11</sup> Among himself, Pearson, and Robertson, Wrong was senior and therefore an obvious choice for Skelton's job.

But, along with being "the most substantial of all these people," he was also, according to King's former assistant James Gibson, "the most pointed and the least tolerant."<sup>12</sup> He had a quick temper, and as his colleague Lester Pearson once explained: "Hume didn't try to get people to like him particularly. He didn't make many concessions. He wouldn't go out of his way to placate people because of their political position if he thought they were wrong ... And he wouldn't mind calling a spade a spade, [or] calling it a bloody shovel if he had to." This attitude did not find favour with Canada's prime minister. In fact, Wrong's contemporary John Deutsch once said: "[Mackenzie] King was death on him." Without King's support, he never stood a chance for the promotion.<sup>13</sup>

Lester Pearson's situation was different. According to Wrong's daughter, June Rogers: "Mike liked everybody, and everybody liked Mike."<sup>14</sup> Pearson's



charm was extraordinary. A former colleague, the well-respected and usually critical Maurice Pope, wrote of him: "It was always not only a pleasure but an inspiration to find oneself associated in anything with the one and only Mike."<sup>15</sup> Others found that he delivered less than he appeared to promise, especially intellectually. The president of the National Research Council, for example, conceded his impeccable charm but called the former semiprofessional athlete "just an educated ballplayer."<sup>16</sup> Another suggested that he had "a massive ego."<sup>17</sup>

Pearson had been doing excellent work in London under Canada's high commissioner, Vincent Massey. With Wrong out of consideration for the undersecretary's position, he seemed to be the next logical choice. Not in the same intellectual class as his former academic colleague in the History Department at the University of Toronto, he still held an Oxford degree, worked extremely hard, and was the best public-relations spokesperson in the diplomatic civil service. Yet his friend and associate Walter Gordon remembered, "there may have been some question as to whether Mike, with his breezy cheerful manner, would be the best man to establish an intimate relationship with the lugubrious Prime Minister."<sup>18</sup> Hilliker has speculated that Pearson might not have been chosen because, being in London, he was simply out of King's mind, but Gordon's explanation merits consideration as well: Mackenzie King demanded full and unquestioning obedience, and Lester Pearson was outspoken and ambitious.<sup>19</sup>

That left Norman Robertson. Although the youngest and most junior of the qualified candidates, he was also the best person for the job. Robertson, wrote one colleague, "had great intellectual gifts and extraordinary mental capacity. He could read and assimilate a dispatch of a cabinet paper in half the time of anyone else. He remembered everything he had read and was able to bring to bear on the consideration of any subject not only a vast amount of knowledge but also good judgment and a ready resourcefulness."<sup>20</sup> Trained as an economist, he had also already caught the attention of the prime minister through his performance as a trade negotiator at a series of international meetings in the late 1930s.

Admittedly, Robertson's daughter Judith has conceded modestly, he "didn't have that easy affability that Mr. Pearson had." He was, however, far better suited to work with Mackenzie King. He was humble, he took great pride in serving his country, and he had no political ambitions.<sup>21</sup> To his biographer, Jack Granatstein, Robertson was "the model civil servant ... His role was to advise, and he performed that task superbly, offering his political masters the benefit of his well-stocked brain and his deep learning."<sup>22</sup> On 28 January, only hours after King had learned of Skelton's death, he offered Robertson the position.

The new undersecretary shared many of his predecessor's personal qualities: exceptional intelligence, a preference for settling internal conflicts

quietly, and somewhat lacklustre organizational skills. At the same time, the much more youthful Robertson had been influenced by profoundly different worldly experiences. Too young to have fought in the First World War, he had developed a more tolerant attitude toward Great Britain and was more comfortable than Skelton seeing Canada actively involved in international affairs.

Robertson's views coincided nicely with those of the officials around him; however, his age (he was not yet thirty-seven) made it difficult for some of them to accept him initially as their superior. One might therefore suggest that the loss of Skelton robbed the department of its direction, but it would be more accurate to say that under their new leader, the young, nationalistic officers gained the freedom to become more flexible and adventurous in their approaches to world affairs.

Hume Wrong seems to have taken the news of Robertson's appointment quite well. Wrong had first met him only in 1939, but from the very beginning, Rogers remembers, "he was just tremendously impressed." When Wrong's wife, Joyce, became bitter that her husband had been passed over for the promotion, he "quickly told her that she was making a big mistake and would not think this if she met Norman."<sup>23</sup> During the war years, Robertson and Wrong established a mutually beneficial and trusting working relationship. The new undersecretary was unprepared, and in some ways ill-suited, for his additional responsibilities, and he came to rely on the colleague whom he called "the ablest man in the service" to handle the organizational duties of the office, which seemed to baffle him. Robertson showed the utmost respect for Wrong's abilities and his intellect, and Wrong, in turn, never questioned Robertson's judgment or his senior status.<sup>24</sup>

The same cannot be said for Lester Pearson. Shortly after King's disappointing announcement, in a speech – given with reluctance – at the Canadian Club, he declared: "I think Norman was the right choice for the job. I shall be pleased and honoured to work under him."<sup>25</sup> But the public statement and his private diary writings tell different stories. Upon his more permanent recall to Ottawa to assume the post of joint assistant undersecretary of state for external affairs (along with Keenleyside) in late March, Pearson wrote revealingly: "Of course I don't like the idea really of going back to the Department, except as Under-Secretary, and I am not quite sure what this post of Joint Assistant Under-Secretary means. My own view is that it means that Mr. King wants Norman Robertson as a sort of super personal assistant and is going to give him the rank of Under-Secretary for that reason, while I am to be brought back to do the work that the Under-Secretary would normally be doing, without being given the rank."<sup>26</sup> Two months later, in a personal letter to Vincent Massey, he left the impression that he had not yet completely overcome his disappointment.<sup>27</sup>

Pearson was jealous, and colleagues admitted later that his frustration was noticeable. Robertson's former assistant once said of him and Pearson: "There was a state of suppressed tension between the two that prevented fruitful relations throughout their entire association ... I am sure, in my own mind, that Mike Pearson was never at ease with Norman."<sup>28</sup> Another associate concurred, noting that Pearson's attitude in the early 1940s caused the relationship to become "ambiguous and difficult."<sup>29</sup> As for Robertson, it was not coincidental that it was Wrong to whom he would turn in planning the new world order and Pearson who would soon be isolated in Washington.<sup>30</sup> After January 1941, therefore, the department's old cohesiveness – which Charles Ritchie had so fondly recalled in 1934 – was no longer in evidence.

The increasingly difficult relationship among some of Canada's top civil servants did not immediately affect the country's official plans for the post-war period. This was not because the diplomats were able to put their rivalries aside; rather, at the official level in 1941, such planning was simply not yet taking place. The situation was different in the nongovernmental sector. In April 1941 members of the World Citizens Association (WCA), a group made up of specialists in international relations from Canada, the United States, and Europe, met in Lake Forest, Illinois, to discuss their visions of a postwar world. Among their conclusions was the statement: "A firm and lasting partnership among the democracies, founded not only upon the recognition of their common interests, but upon acceptance of their responsibilities toward other nations, constitutes the first of the peace aims – the indispensable foundation for all future plans." There was a need for a more elaborate version of the League of Nations, one that would invoke the concepts of regionalism and universalism. Planning for this new organization, they maintained, should begin immediately.<sup>31</sup>

In May the executive committee of Canada's 4,000-person League of Nations Society, which included at least one member of the WCA, passed a resolution urging the Canadian government to form a committee on post-war organization.<sup>32</sup> Less than two weeks later, Brooke Claxton – who had links to both the society and the CIIA and who was well-acquainted with representatives of the WCA – sent a letter to Robertson urging immediate action. He waited three weeks for a response and then wrote again, this time attaching a detailed memorandum recommending that his government sponsor a thorough study of international reconstruction.<sup>33</sup>

However interested Robertson might have been personally, it appears that the combination of the immediate stresses brought on by his new position – learning the job, earning the respect of his peers, attempting to establish a sense of structure within one of the most disorganized departments in Ottawa – and the hiring restrictions that had been imposed throughout the

civil service in the early years of the war precluded any consideration of the distant future. Himself a partisan Liberal, Claxton might have tried to approach Robertson's superior, Mackenzie King, but during the war, King was (justifiably) inaccessible to anyone but his closest advisers.

The Canadian government's inability, or unwillingness, to contemplate the postwar era between 1939 and 1941 left it a full two years behind its Anglo-American great-power allies in the planning process. In the United Kingdom the RIIA initiated its dialogue on postwar political reconstruction in May 1939, three months prior to Hitler's attack on Poland.<sup>34</sup> While Mackenzie King was bracing his country for the possibility of war, the RIIA's world-order preparatory group held its first meeting at Chatham House on 17 July 1939. The discussion emphasized the importance of maintaining the rule of law in international relations.<sup>35</sup>

Unlike the CIIA, which struggled to be heard in Ottawa through much of 1941, the RIIA had already established close links to the government in London. Its impact was evident in October 1939 when Lord Lothian, the British ambassador in Washington, alluded publicly to a future global federation. His comments foresaw an international order in which regional organizations would police the world under the umbrella of a unifying executive body. Lothian was acting boldly in expressing this idea to a people who had, in his own words, "been taught to justify their own abandonment of international co-operation in 1920 by discrediting [President Woodrow] Wilson and all his works and their own action in 1917-1919 and by crediting all other governments and peoples with the basest motives," but his experience in the United States made him confident that America was "gradually becoming reconciled to the necessity of playing a hand in some form of world organization not for war but to prevent world war."<sup>36</sup>

His instincts were correct. On 16 September 1939 the US secretary of state, Cordell Hull, saw fit to appoint Leo Pasvolosky his special assistant responsible primarily for postwar settlement issues. In December the secretary and his new assistant gathered the department's senior officers, and together they created what eventually became an advisory committee on problems of foreign relations. Working within the Division for the Study of Problems of Peace and Reconstruction, the committee discussed "possibilities of political arrangements for the maintenance of peace ... methods of limitation of national sovereignty [and] problems of general machinery of international co-operation."<sup>37</sup> Again, unlike the government in Ottawa, the government in Washington immediately accepted support from its RIIA equivalent, the Council on Foreign Relations.

All of the American preparation took place in relative secrecy. During the so-called phoney war of 1939 and early 1940, President Roosevelt feared that the still isolationist general public would not accept US political involvement in what it felt was a European conflict.<sup>38</sup> When Hitler marched

through France, however, things began to change. Almost immediately, Roosevelt pursued closer military and economic ties with both Canada and Great Britain. In August 1940 Canada and the United States signed the Ogdensburg Agreement, creating a permanent joint board on defence for North America. The United States then agreed to exchange some of its old destroyers with the United Kingdom for long-term leases on a series of naval bases in and around Newfoundland. When the American Lend-Lease Act – designed to provide financial aid in the form of munitions to Britain and its European allies – threatened Canada’s economic security and caused Mackenzie King to complain that his country was being “overlooked” by both the US and the UK, Cordell Hull promised to “endeavor to guard against this omission in the future.”<sup>39</sup> Canada and the United States then quickly signed an agreement at Hyde Park that restored continental economic stability.

When it came to North Atlantic political cooperation, perhaps because they did not find Canada sufficiently important, but also at least in part because the Canadians had not undertaken any formal planning themselves, the American and British officials collaborated more exclusively. As a first step, Winston Churchill made Lord Halifax – a senior minister who kept in regular touch with representatives of the RIA – his new ambassador to Washington.

Halifax arrived in the United States just as President Roosevelt announced to Congress that he anticipated a postwar system founded upon what became known worldwide as the four freedoms.<sup>40</sup> The new ambassador made inquiries into the implications of the speech but initially discovered very little. It did not take him long to realize why. In a letter to Britain’s foreign secretary a few weeks later, he expressed amazement at the sensitivity of American political officials “to the ripples of public opinion.”<sup>41</sup> Indeed, in 1941, according to the American Institute of Public Opinion (AIPO), only one-third of voting Americans were thinking about how world peace might be maintained after the end of what most felt was a European war.<sup>42</sup> Critics of Roosevelt who would later accuse him of lacking “long range vision”<sup>43</sup> misunderstood his intentions. In January 1941 the US president admitted to one long-time adviser that the isolationist impulse still prevalent among the American people obligated him to continue the postwar strategizing, to which he was utterly committed, in relative secrecy.<sup>44</sup>

America’s public silence inadvertently held back the progress of the Canadian internationalists. Without evidence of what their US colleagues had been doing, they could not convince their government that it was being left behind. Specifically, Mackenzie King was unaware that on 3 February 1941 the United States had formalized its planning process by establishing a division of special research. It was tasked with foreign-policy analysis related specifically to changes in international relations. Leo Pasvolksy, fast

becoming the State Department's foremost expert on international organization, was made chief of the new unit.<sup>45</sup>

At about the same time, President Roosevelt sent his personal assistant, Harry Hopkins, to London to propose what would have to be, given the German naval threat in the Atlantic, a secret encounter between himself and Prime Minister Churchill to discuss wartime collaboration. Originally planned for the early spring, scheduling problems postponed the conference until the late summer. Roosevelt had considered Ottawa as a meeting place but decided against it to avoid having to explain to Mackenzie King that he could not be invited. Later asked why, he answered simply, "I really couldn't take him."<sup>46</sup> In America's view, Canada had no place at a summit of two major leaders.

The government in London did not entirely agree. After the fall of France, and with the threat of a German invasion imminent, Canada and the rest of the dominions had become crucial to Britain's national defence. At the end of March 1941, when the committee on reconstruction considered the implications of sharing Britain's postwar plans with the United States, one civil servant reminded his colleagues that any discussions that excluded the increasingly important dominion governments would have to be treated as preliminary.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately for Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, the British Foreign Office (FO) did not share his concerns. Still convinced that Britain could remain a great power on its own, the FO ignored instructions to improve communication between London and the Commonwealth governments.

In June, with just over eight weeks left until the Anglo-American meeting, Canada had yet to learn anything about Britain's postwar thinking. When Canadian High Commissioner Vincent Massey finally received the opportunity to press Britain for more information, he argued forcefully that since Canada would have a significant role to play in the peace process, it was important that it be kept informed. The vagueness of the response from the Foreign Office suggests that it did not agree.<sup>48</sup>

Mackenzie King, therefore, did not know about the meeting between Roosevelt and Churchill that began on 9 August 1941. Nor was he aware that it took place in Canada's backyard, on a pair of battleships in Argentia Harbour on the coast of Newfoundland. The meeting demonstrated that Canada was not needed to mediate between its greatest allies. After just two days of talks, having gotten along effortlessly, the parties exchanged drafts of a joint public statement.<sup>49</sup>

Of the eight points in what was called the Atlantic Charter, it was the last one that would have the greatest political impact on the future world order. The British had proposed that both countries pledge to create an "effective international organization" after the war. Roosevelt, however, was reluctant to risk the response of the still isolationist American public to such a bold

statement.<sup>50</sup> He preferred to speak of a joint US-UK police force to safeguard Europe during the inevitable postwar transition period. Churchill, who was more concerned personally with military strategy and who, indeed, had already privately declared himself “too old to have anything to do with postwar planning,”<sup>51</sup> brought the problem to his much more forward-thinking Cabinet by telegraph and found a compromise. Rather than explicitly referring to an international organization, he proposed to include the words “pending the establishment of a wider and more permanent system of general security.” The internationalists in Great Britain would be disappointed, but they could be convinced to regard the result “as an interim and partial settlement of war aims” and as an assurance that their government’s vision of the future was developing responsibly. Roosevelt too would not be entirely pleased, but he would accept the new wording so that he could emerge from the talks with what he needed: a joint public statement of principles.<sup>52</sup>

In the end, the eighth article read:

They believe that all of the nations of the world, for realistic as well as spiritual reasons must come to the abandonment of the use of force. Since no future peace can be maintained if land, sea or air armaments continue to be employed by nations which threaten, or may threaten, aggression outside of their frontiers, they believe, pending the establishment of a wider and permanent system of general security, that the disarmament of such nations is essential. They will likewise aid and encourage all other practicable measures which will lighten for peace-loving peoples the crushing burden of armaments.<sup>53</sup>

When Mackenzie King learned of the Argentinia meeting, he was hurt, if not upset. He did not mind that Roosevelt and Churchill had excluded him *per se*, but holding the talks so close to Canada without his knowing had made both him and his country look unimportant. Clearly, this would not sit well with the Canadian public, particularly during a period when it was being asked to make sacrifices for the sake of the war.<sup>54</sup> Sensing trouble, Norman Robertson attempted to downplay the importance of the Atlantic Charter to his prime minister. It did not really contain any new ideas, he explained. It served merely to publicize a set of principles that would underlie future discussions of international relations.<sup>55</sup>

While perhaps true of some of the articles, this was not at all the case in terms of world organization. To the British Foreign Research and Press Service, Churchill had now committed Great Britain, at least in principle, to “some form of continuing security system.”<sup>56</sup> American officials also believed that the declaration was important, although they could not quite determine what the final article meant. It might have been referring to a great-power police force, but alternatively it could have been promoting a

new, structured international organization. In either case, one officer noted confidently: "To be compatible with American desires and acceptable to our electorate the international body [would] have to be built to our specifications."<sup>57</sup>

He had good reason to feel secure. By drafting the charter in such vague terms, the United Kingdom had made a significant concession to the United States. On behalf of the rest of the international community, including its own dominions, it had assured the government in Washington, at least implicitly, that America would have the final word on the composition of any new world organization. Indeed, as the historian David Reynolds has argued: "1941 marked the U.S.A.'s self-conscious assertion of her potential as a great power, even though she was not at war – a situation that often reduced the British Government to diplomatic impotence."<sup>58</sup> Since the fall of France, Britain had been the single most dominant power in wartime planning. Quickly, however, this was beginning to change.

At the time, Mackenzie King could not have been aware of the power shift; he was too focused on his constituents to pay close attention. The Conservatives were effectively criticizing his government for failing to have been represented at *Argentia*. In August, setting aside Norman Robertson's attempts to calm him, King told Britain's new high commissioner to Canada, Malcolm MacDonald, that he would have to visit London to reaffirm his country's worldly importance.<sup>59</sup>

During his three-week stay in the fall of 1941, the Canadian prime minister made certain that both he and his electorate got the reassurance that they needed. On 4 September, King delivered a particularly well-received speech at *Mansion House* that earned public praise from Churchill. The momentum from the talk carried through the rest of the trip. According to two historians of Canadian external affairs, King's visit to London "proved a source of inspiration to the whole Canadian people and strengthened the conviction of many that Canada had a distinct and significant role to play in the existing world crisis."<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps they were right, but King had not converted Brooke Claxton. Canada's exclusion from *Argentia* had convinced him that the government could not be counted on to take a leadership role in postwar planning. In October he moved successfully that the CIIA create its own research group to study the implications of the Atlantic Charter.<sup>61</sup> In November, at the annual meeting of its national council, the CIIA dedicated all of its available resources to the postwar period. Records of the minutes noted this new focus: "During the course of the discussion, emphasis was placed by the speakers on the very great responsibility which the Institute must accept for considering the pressing problems of postwar reconstruction in Canada, and in the world, with special attention to the relations between Great Britain, the United States and Canada. There was a general feeling that, at a



time when Governments are heavily engaged in the business of carrying on the war, a unique organization like the C.I.I.A. must accept responsibility for considering how the peace can be won."<sup>62</sup>

Ironically, just as the CIIA abandoned its faith in the Canadian government, Norman Robertson finally began to mobilize the Department of External Affairs. Since wartime restrictions prevented him from hiring the additional staff necessary to pursue an internationalist agenda in the traditional way, he sought temporary help from his former academic colleagues. Himself a University of British Columbia graduate, Robertson first asked the professor of political science and economics Henry Angus to move to Ottawa and assume the position of departmental "special assistant." Angus was a member of the CIIA and had studied the Versailles settlement in depth. He was expected to contribute constructively to postwar discussions. George Glazebrook, known to Pearson from the History Department of the University of Toronto, soon joined him. Glazebrook had sat on the CIIA research committee that had been tasked with looking into the shape of the postwar world. In all, approximately twenty university professors eventually worked for External Affairs during the war, nearly all of whom had direct or at least indirect ties to the CIIA. The recruitment of these academics created a planning infrastructure within the Canadian civil service that was similar to those already established in Great Britain and the United States. Two years after the Anglo-American process of planning the postwar order had started, Canada was finally taking its first small step forward.<sup>63</sup>

Beyond the East Block, however, this step was hardly noticeable. Domestically, Canada's most significant wartime concern in late 1941 remained the possibility of conscription. The former prime minister, Arthur Meighen, had revived Conservative support for compulsory service in November, and after the Japanese attack on the United States at Pearl Harbor on 7 December, even Mackenzie King had begun to contemplate ways of releasing his government from its commitment to a purely volunteer overseas military force.

The Canadian public expressed relief that America had finally joined the conflict and responded willingly to the never-ending orders coming from the office of the new minister of munitions and supply, C.D. Howe. Most of the country hardly noticed that the great powers were once again acting alone. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Churchill and Roosevelt met privately in Washington to coordinate their military efforts through what they described as a supreme war council. To maintain the support of the smaller contributing forces, they discussed a possible joint declaration of what Roosevelt called the United Nations – a pledge by the UK, the US, and all of their allies to abide by the principles of the Atlantic Charter and to pursue victory until the enemy had surrendered.<sup>64</sup> After they learned of these decisions, some of the more activist members of Canada's Department of External Affairs

expressed a legitimate concern that the new command structure would set a precedent for great-power control during the postwar period as well. Thinking back to 1919, they began to formulate strategies to ensure that Canada's influence after the war would be commensurate with its current and projected military and economic contributions.<sup>65</sup>

Because they had become dependent on Canadian economic support, the British were initially sympathetic. Lord Halifax implored Cordell Hull to grant the dominions a degree of status on the Anglo-American supreme war council. The results of his efforts, however, were disappointing and reflective of Great Britain's diminishing influence in the alliance. The State Department claimed that additional members would render the body "unwieldy and ineffective." Instead, US officials suggested possible provisions for relevant governments to be represented on an ad hoc basis.<sup>66</sup>

America's inflexibility prevented Norman Robertson from viewing the United Nations Declaration until just three days before its scheduled release. When he finally saw it, the undersecretary was disappointed; first, Canada had been denied input into the draft; now, in the list of adherents, the great powers – in this case the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and China – had segregated themselves. "In terms of war potential or immediately effective contribution to the struggle," Robertson reported to Prime Minister King, "it is difficult to put what is left of Free China in a separate and higher category than that which will contain Canada, the Netherlands and India."<sup>67</sup>

Working at the Canadian Embassy in Washington at the time, Hume Wrong was instructed to deliver a memorandum expressing this and other concerns to America's assistant secretary of state, Adolf Berle. The cynical former Harvard Law School professor and noted Anglophobe did little more than shrug, citing the complications that could arise from reopening the declaration so close to its planned publication. Presumably following orders, Wrong responded sympathetically, stressing only that in the future the United States had best avoid sending messages to Ottawa through London; Canada expected direct communication. The two parted with the Canadian government seemingly committed to the declaration without reservations.<sup>68</sup>

It is difficult to determine how Mackenzie King felt about Berle's dismissive treatment of Wrong. On the day of their meeting, Winston Churchill was in Ottawa speaking to a joint session of the House of Commons and the Senate. The British prime minister gave what one member called "the speech of a great warrior, whose words of defiance inspired free men to fight irrevocably."<sup>69</sup> With his usual flare for the dramatic, Churchill called Canada "a potent magnet drawing together those in the new world and in the old world whose fortunes are now united in a deadly

struggle for life and honour against the common foe."<sup>70</sup> An American witness to the event wrote of the unprecedented impact that the prime minister's presence had had on the country, noting that it had spurred the nation to a more determined war effort.<sup>71</sup> Any problems with the joint statement were therefore quickly forgotten.

The Declaration of the United Nations was released on 1 January 1942, with Canada among its twenty-six original signatories. To follow up, Britain and the United States established a series of combined boards to coordinate their military and economic war effort. The boards were managed by a combined chiefs-of-staff committee with offices in Washington and London. As a British dominion, Canada was not represented.

While, to some, the result might suggest that little had changed in Ottawa between 1939 and 1942, in reality, when it came to the postwar planning process, this was far from true. Canada had entered the war firmly committed to limiting its international liabilities. It had been led by a prime minister who preferred to ignore external relations and an undersecretary of state for external affairs who encouraged his isolationist tendencies. Just over two years later, it was fully engaged in what had become a truly global conflict. Unlike his predecessor in the East Block, Norman Robertson was comfortable with the internationalist views of organizations such as the CIIA and expected Canada to have a role in the future peace at least commensurate to its military and economic contribution to winning the war. Still, however, the new undersecretary's team was not as cohesive as it had been under O.D. Skelton. Also, because of its late start and Mackenzie King's continued aversion to global commitments, Canada remained far behind its allies in postwar planning. These factors, along with the Canadian public's still limited interest in reconstruction, would play a significant role the following year in the creation and composition of the first, precedent-setting postwar body: the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.