

## Historical Papers Communications historiques



# The Politicians and the “Pearsonalities”: The Diefenbaker Government and the Conduct of Canadian External Relations

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Volume 19, Number 1, 1984

Guelph 1984

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030922ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/030922ar>

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Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0068-8878 (print)

1712-9109 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Hilliker, J. F. (1984). The Politicians and the “Pearsonalities”: The Diefenbaker Government and the Conduct of Canadian External Relations. *Historical Papers / Communications historiques*, 19(1), 151–167. <https://doi.org/10.7202/030922ar>

Article abstract

After twenty-two years of Liberal rule, the Progressive Conservatives under John Diefenbaker inherited, in 1957, a Department of External Affairs which had been strongly influenced by the attitudes, techniques and personality of the then-current leader of the Liberal party, Lester Pearson. Diefenbaker was deeply suspicious of the department's assumed partisanship, and worried about the effects of Pearson's proteges, the “Pearsonalities,” on the conduct of foreign affairs. In spite of his inexperience, the prime minister initially took on the portfolio himself. Even after the appointment of Sidney Smith as secretary of state, Diefenbaker continued his active interest and involvement in the department's affairs.

After Smith's unexpected death in 1959, the portfolio was filled by Howard Green, in whom the prime minister rested more confidence. On balance, the author contends. Green maintained a healthy independence from control by his senior departmental officials. While the bureaucrats were not hitherto put forward initiatives of their own - aid to francophone Africa is cited as one example - senior civil servants appear to have carefully avoided any implication of partisanship. At the same time, the prime minister's selective but forceful interest in some aspect of foreign policy meant that decisions on these subjects were sometimes uninfluenced by the department. In matters such as South Africa's membership in the Commonwealth and relations with the Soviet Union, the prime minister's views and actions could be decisive. On policy issues such as Britain's entrance into the EEC, External Affairs had to contend with a further locus of power - the sometimes independent intervention of Canada's high commissioner in London, the highly respected George Drew, and with his direct access to the prime minister.

This sometimes confusing situation, of competing centres of power, was perhaps most tellingly illustrated by the government's handling of the nuclear weapons debate, which contributed to the government's resignation and subsequent electoral defeat. Foreign policy concerns themselves did not dominate the election, but the government's reputation for indecisiveness derived largely from its conduct of external affairs. In this respect, Diefenbaker's treatment of foreign policy decisions deeply influenced the election.

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# The Politicians and the “Pearsonalities”: The Diefenbaker Government and the Conduct of Canadian External Relations

JOHN F. HILLIKER

## Résumé

*After twenty-two years of Liberal rule, the Progressive Conservatives under John Diefenbaker inherited, in 1957, a Department of External Affairs which had been strongly influenced by the attitudes, techniques and personality of the then-current leader of the Liberal party, Lester Pearson. Diefenbaker was deeply suspicious of the department's assumed partisanship, and worried about the effects of Pearson's protégés, the “Pearsonalities,” on the conduct of foreign affairs. In spite of his inexperience, the prime minister initially took on the portfolio himself. Even after the appointment of Sidney Smith as secretary of state, Diefenbaker continued his active interest and involvement in the department's affairs.*

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*Après vingt-deux ans de règne Libéral, les Conservateurs, sous John Diefenbaker, prirent le pouvoir en 1957. Ils héritèrent d'un Ministère des affaires extérieures qui avait été fortement influencé par les attitudes, les techniques et la personnalité du leader*

*Libéral d'alors, Lester Pearson. Diefenbaker fut profondément méfiant à l'égard du présumé caractère partisan du ministère, et inquiet de l'influence que les protégés de Pearson, les **Pearsonnalités**. Malgré son inexpérience, le premier ministre assumait d'abord la responsabilité du portefeuille, afin d'en amorcer la transformation. Même après la nomination de Sidney Smith au poste de secrétaire d'Etat, Diefenbaker continua d'être intéressé aux affaires du ministère, dont il s'occupait activement. Après la décès inattendu de Smith en 1959, le portefeuille fut confié à Howard Green, auquel le premier ministre accordait une plus grande confiance. L'auteur affirme que, dans l'ensemble, Green réussit à maintenir une saine indépendance face au contrôle de ses hauts fonctionnaires. S'ils n'hésitaient pas à présenter leurs propres initiatives — l'aide à l'Afrique francophone est citée en exemple — les hauts fonctionnaires semblent avoir prudemment évité tout élément partisan. Au même moment, l'intérêt sélectif mais prononcé que le premier ministre portait à certains aspects de la politique étrangère fit que les décisions sur ces questions furent parfois soustraites à l'influence du ministère. Dans des questions telles l'appartenance de l'Afrique du Sud au Commonwealth et les relations avec l'Union soviétique, les opinions et les actions du premier ministre pouvaient avoir un effet décisif. Dans des questions de politique, comme l'entrée de la Grande Bretagne à la CEE, les fonctionnaires des Affaires extérieures devaient tenir compte d'une autre influence puissante: l'intervention parfois indépendante du Haut commissaire du Canada à Londres, George Drew, qui était très respecté et qui avait accès direct au premier ministre.*

*Cette concurrence entre les centre du pouvoir portait parfois à confusion; le meilleur exemple en est peut-être la façon dont le gouvernement a mené le débat sur les armes nucléaires. Ce débat a contribué à la démission du gouvernement et à sa subséquente défaite électorale. Les questions de politique étrangère n'ont pas dominé l'élection, mais le réputation d'indécision du gouvernement découlait largement de sa conduite en matière d'affaires extérieures. En ce sens, la façon dont Diefenbaker s'occupait des décisions de politique étrangère influença profondément l'élection.*

When the Progressive Conservatives came to power in Ottawa under John Diefenbaker on 10 June 1957, they inherited, in the Department of External Affairs, a foreign policy establishment with an impressive reputation.<sup>1</sup> It was an asset, however, to be viewed with some caution by a new government, for it had grown to maturity during twenty-two years of Liberal rule. During about half that period, moreover, it had been under the direction, first at the under-secretarial and then at the cabinet level, of the outgoing minister, Lester Pearson, who, soon after the election, succeeded to the leadership of his party and hence of the parliamentary opposition. At worst, members of such a department might be suspected of giving clandestine help to Pearson and his political colleagues. Even if that possibility were dismissed as fanciful, there remained the more

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1. My understanding of this subject has been much assisted by interviews with a number of participants in the policy-making process, to all of whom I am very grateful. I have also benefited from the comments of Basil Robinson. The views expressed are mine and not necessarily those of the Department of External Affairs.

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subtle danger that reliance on the department's capability and expertise might make the new government captive to priorities and policies established under Pearson rather than setting new ones of its own. These suspicions and anxieties are part of the background to the term "Pearsonalities" which Diefenbaker coined to describe members of the Department of External Affairs.<sup>2</sup>

There is a good deal of testimony that members of the Department of External Affairs upheld the principle of nonpartisanship and indeed took considerable care to avoid even innocent social relationships with Pearson, which, if misunderstood, might give rise to suspicion.<sup>3</sup> While not all ministers were satisfied with the adjustment made by the department, the cause seems to have been nothing worse than insensitivity on the part of some officials.<sup>4</sup> Nor did members of the department expect that prevailing assumptions would survive unchallenged. Rather, according to an assistant under-secretary of the time, it had to be assumed that all decisions of the outgoing government were subject to revision. And even if they had wanted to mount a campaign of indoctrination, the resources were lacking. The department was short-staffed in the senior ranks in Ottawa;<sup>5</sup> there were no arrangements for comprehensive background briefing of the new ministers; and the style in departmental memoranda, developed to meet the requirements of an experienced minister and adhered to after his departure,<sup>6</sup> was to present not single-minded policy recommendations but a variety of options in the expectation that the minister himself would take the decision.

Diefenbaker did not rely on these constraints to operate unaided. Much concerned to preserve the autonomy of the elected executive, he made sure that Cabinet, rather than ministerial or interdepartmental committees, remained very much the locus of discussion and decision-making. In Cabinet, associates were aware, he kept a particularly close watch on those who seemed insufficiently independent of their civil-service advisers. At the same time, he maintained resources of his own to guide his judgement, for he kept in touch with and added to a broad acquaintance of informal advisers across the country which he had built up over his years in politics. External Affairs was affected by these practices in some ways more than most departments. Diefenbaker had preeminence in matters involving other heads of government and, for the first three months of his administration, had direct responsibility for the department as well, since he retained the portfolio himself. His conduct at that time was an indication of the division of labour he thought appropriate between the elected executive and officials in External Affairs. According to an assistant under-secretary who dealt with him then, Diefenbaker recognised that he could not expect to master the minutiae of the External Affairs portfolio and, especially on the technical side, would have to rely on the guidance of officials. His

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2. Peter C. Newman, *Renegade in Power* (Carleton Library ed., Toronto, 1973), p. 252.
  3. See, for example, Charles Ritchie, *Storm Signals* (Toronto, 1983), p. 158, and J.L. Granatstein, *A Man of Influence* (Ottawa, 1981), p. 324.
  4. Peter Stursberg, *Diefenbaker: Leadership Gained* (Toronto, 1975), p. 147.
  5. Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC), Norman Robertson Papers, MG30 E163, Vol. 3A, J.W. Holmes to Robertson, 1 August 1957.
  6. See, for example, Department of External Affairs (hereinafter DEA), File 11246-40, Holmes to W.D. Matthews, 27 June 1957.

interest in substantive involvement was in major issues affecting the direction of the new government's policy.

There were good reasons for Diefenbaker to take this approach. While there was a considerable measure of agreement on foreign policy between the new government and its predecessor, for example on the usefulness of Canada's middle-power role in times of international tension, the recent election campaign had also revealed significant differences. In particular, such controversies as the previous government's conduct in the Suez crisis of 1956 and its handling of economic relations with the United States had enabled the Conservatives to exploit their traditional position as the party defending Canada's autonomy in North America while upholding the British and Commonwealth connection. As well, Diefenbaker, whose personality was the centrepiece of Conservative publicity, was identified with certain principles, such as concern for human rights, applicable to international as well as to domestic affairs. The campaign, however, did not produce a comprehensive programme for the conduct of external relations. Rather, it left latent contradictions in the party's declared objectives and failed to anticipate some of the significant changes in the international situation which took place while the Conservatives were in office. External relations, therefore, were likely to provide a challenging test of the decision-making process under Diefenbaker.

The new prime minister got off to a rather uncertain start as a result of two episodes which caused the government some embarrassment: his suggestion that steps would be taken to shift 15 percent of Canada's imports from United States to British sources, and his approval of joining the United States in an integrated North American air defence command (NORAD) without insisting on an intergovernmental agreement. In taking these actions without consulting cabinet or departmental officials beforehand,<sup>7</sup> Diefenbaker no doubt was the victim of inexperience, and the risks involved in ill-considered action were soon appreciated.<sup>8</sup> A potentially more serious problem was communication with External Affairs. Diefenbaker, those around him realised, had little patience with the shaded language of diplomacy, and he did not have either the time or the experience to deal with lengthy expositions of issues. What he needed was guidance, expressed succinctly, which alerted him to the implications of decisions he was being asked to take. But, despite advice on his requirements,<sup>9</sup> much of the paper reaching him remained more suited to a politician experienced in foreign affairs. The same was true of speech material. Diefenbaker, noted a contributor, wanted his speeches on foreign policy as on other matters to have relevance to the ordinary Canadian voter, but what he got from External Affairs often seemed to be pitched to the more specialised and elitist audience favoured by Pearson and his prime minister, Louis St. Laurent.

7. Discussion of trade policy is recorded in DEA, File 50085-G-40, minutes of a meeting of the ministers of Finance and Trade and Commerce with officials..., 22 June 1957, and Privy Council Office (hereinafter PCO) Records, Cabinet Conclusions, 22 July 1957. I have not found confirmation in departmental sources that Diefenbaker consulted a senior member of External Affairs before agreeing to NORAD; cf. R.H. Roy, *For Most Distinguished Bravery* (Vancouver, 1977), p. 290.

8. See, for example, PCO Records, Cabinet Conclusions, 11 April 1958.

9. DEA, File 11246-40, Holmes to Matthews, 27 June 1957.

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These differences of style were another reason for Diefenbaker to regard members of the Department of External Affairs as "Pearsonalities." They affected not only the rank and file but also, an observer of their relationship has recalled, the under-secretary, Jules Léger, despite the high regard the prime minister had for him personally.<sup>10</sup> As a result of this problem in communications and his suspicion of the department as a creation of his political opponents, Diefenbaker at first tended to keep his distance from it in handling foreign affairs, excluding its representatives from his meetings with foreign leaders, omitting debriefing afterwards,<sup>11</sup> and neglecting to refer to it important communications which he received on international subjects. To overcome this problem, R. B. Bryce, Clerk of the Privy Council and Diefenbaker's most trusted civil-service adviser, arranged for the appointment of an experienced foreign service officer as special departmental assistant in the Prime Minister's Office. The first incumbent, Basil Robinson, who remained in place until 1962, became, on the basis of the confidence he earned from Diefenbaker and his associates, a highly effective means of communication between the prime minister and the department.<sup>12</sup> He also tried to educate the department about Diefenbaker's requirements, but some subjects had to be dealt with in complex and subtle terms. As a result, Diefenbaker years later still remembered the departmental style for "decorative uncertainty."<sup>13</sup>

Another means of getting around the problem of communication between Diefenbaker and the Department of External Affairs of course was the appointment of a full-time minister. In September of 1957 Diefenbaker filled the position by going outside the Conservative caucus to choose Sidney Smith, president of the University of Toronto. Diefenbaker, however, kept in touch with the portfolio through copies of important telegrams and other communications from posts abroad, a daily summary of significant international developments,<sup>14</sup> and private communication which he encouraged with officials whose ideas he thought might be useful. Smith's performance probably caused the scrutiny to become more intense than it would otherwise have been. Although his reputation as a university administrator earned him a warm welcome from the press and the Conservative caucus,<sup>15</sup> it proved to be insufficient compensation for his inexperience in both electoral politics and foreign affairs. As a result, he was not a very effective spokesman for his area of responsibility, and Diefenbaker was concerned as well that he was overly reliant on his officials.<sup>16</sup> This concern no doubt increased after Norman Robertson, whom Smith favoured, succeeded Léger in the autumn of 1958, for the

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10. Diefenbaker Centre, Saskatoon, Diefenbaker interview with John Munro, 4 December 1974.

11. See, for example, PAC, Robertson Papers, MG30 E163, Vol. 3A, Holmes to Robertson, 1 August 1957.

12. Granatstein, *Man of Influence*, pp. 325-6.

13. Diefenbaker Centre, Diefenbaker interview with John Munro, 14 December 1974.

14. DEA, File 12685-40, R. B. Bryce to Jules Léger, 16 September 1957; *ibid.*, Léger to Bryce, 15 October 1957.

15. Blair Fraser, "Backstage at Ottawa," *Maclean's*, 12 October 1957, p. 2; *Telegram* (Toronto), 16 September 1957.

16. Diefenbaker Centre, Diefenbaker interview with John Munro, 6 December 1974. See also Trevor Lloyd, *Canada in World Affairs, 1957-1959* (Toronto, 1968), p. 70, and Granatstein, *Man of Influence*, pp. 326-7.

relationship between the prime minister and the new under-secretary was never better than strained.<sup>17</sup> It was not unusual, one writer has observed, for a secretary of state for external affairs to enjoy less latitude than Pearson had had under St. Laurent but, while Smith held the office, prime ministerial involvement was sufficiently evident to leave the impression that there were two centres of decision-making.<sup>18</sup> Equally important, Smith's weakness in cabinet meant that his department's expertise was not always brought forcefully to bear on decisions to which it was relevant.

It was while Sidney Smith was secretary of state for external affairs that Diefenbaker's government took most of its decisions on acquiring weapons systems with nuclear capability for the Canadian armed forces. With encouragement from Léger,<sup>19</sup> Diefenbaker at the same time gave high priority to "the search for disarmament with the Soviet Union,"<sup>20</sup> but without anticipating the potential for conflict between the two courses of policy which was to be a source of difficulty for his government later on. One reason may have been the inexperience and comparative weakness of the secretary of state for external affairs. According to the Cabinet conclusions, diplomatic objectives did not feature in discussions of equipment for the armed forces, which concentrated on strategic, economic and domestic political considerations.

The sudden death of Sidney Smith on 17 March 1959 brought more forceful ministerial leadership to External Affairs in the person of Howard Green, whom Diefenbaker, after resuming the portfolio himself in the interim, named to take over in June. Formerly minister of public works, Green brought to his new office long experience in the House of Commons, a solid position in Cabinet, and the confidence of the prime minister.<sup>21</sup> While some members of his new department were disconcerted by gaps in his knowledge of international affairs and by his lack of subtlety in negotiation,<sup>22</sup> His shrewdness and firmness were much admired by one of the most experienced diplomats in the service, Charles Ritchie at the United Nations.<sup>23</sup> At headquarters, he worked closely and confidently with the under-secretary<sup>24</sup> and other senior officers, but his habits were such that he did not give up his independence to them. He placed a good deal of confidence in his senior departmental assistant, Ross Campbell, who was by no means reluctant to raise considerations additional or contrary to those produced by the flow of advice from the department. Green also established direct contact with individual officers, down to the desk level, who were dealing with subjects that particularly interested him. He was careful to keep control himself of areas of policy he considered to be of special importance and, although he moderated his opinions and developed new

17. See Granatstein, *Man of Influence*, pp. 316, 320-1 and 323-6.

18. Lloyd, *Canada in World Affairs*, pp. 18 and 20.

19. DEA, File 50245-40, Léger to Prime Minister, 13 August 1958.

20. House of Commons *Debates*, 20 February 1959, p. 1223.

21. Stursberg, *Diefenbaker: Leadership Gained*, p. 185; Blair Fraser, "The Lone Pine of Parliament Hill," *Maclean's*, 1 August 1959, pp. 17 and 49-50.

22. CJOH television, Ottawa, "Insight", Peter Dobell interview with Douglas Fisher, 13 January 1980; Arnold Heeney, *The Things That Are Caesar's* (Toronto, 1972), p. 179.

23. Charles Ritchie, *Diplomatic Passport* (Toronto, 1981), p. 171.

24. See Granatstein, *Man of Influence*, pp. 327-8.

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interests to take account of his experience in office, he did not change his mind readily once he had made a commitment. Additionally, he tended to specialise, concentrating his energy on a limited range of issues which seemed to him of paramount importance.

The most important of these issues was nuclear disarmament. Closely related was Green's opposition to the acquisition of nuclear arms by Canadian forces and even more to their location within the country's borders, a condition which he feared would affect the credibility of his campaign for disarmament. These concerns were shared by Robertson, who had informed Diefenbaker of his views before Green took over External Affairs.<sup>25</sup> But Green, influenced by his memories of the First World War and reinforced by encouragement from his wife, a biochemist, and his friend C.J. Mackenzie, chairman of the Atomic Energy Control Board,<sup>26</sup> came to his own conclusions without prompting by Robertson. About a week after taking office at External Affairs, Green signalled his doubts about nuclear weapons<sup>27</sup> and it was only some time later, at the end of July of 1959, that Robertson set out his own position for the minister.<sup>28</sup> Green, moreover, remembered as the decisive influence on his thinking, not Robertson's submission, but the discussion, at the United Nations General Assembly in the autumn of 1959, of fallout from nuclear tests.<sup>29</sup> Robertson in fact did not at first always recommend as uncompromising a line on nuclear questions as Green favoured<sup>30</sup> or respond as promptly as the minister would have liked to requests for resources for work on disarmament. The minister, however, made sure that he got what he wanted, for these were subjects over which he maintained close personal scrutiny. An officer who felt the effects has recalled that pressure from the minister's office produced not only the creation of a Disarmament Division<sup>31</sup> but a noticeable diversion of energies to that subject from other parts of the department as well. In due course, Robertson, particularly as a result of shared concern over tendencies in United States' policy, moved towards the minister's position, so that together they constituted, a worried observer noted, "a negative force of great importance" on the nuclear question.<sup>32</sup> But it was not an equal partnership, for throughout the pace was set by the minister rather than the under-secretary or other officials.

While Green had objectives of his own, he was also willing to serve as a vehicle for initiatives originating in his department. It was as a result of such an initiative and the minister's support that the Diefenbaker government decided to provide economic assistance to countries in francophone Africa. The suggestion originated with the deputy under-secretary, Marcel Cadieux, who was concerned about criticism in Quebec of the Commonwealth bias of Canadian aid programmes.<sup>33</sup> He therefore suggested a new

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25. *Ibid.*, pp. 338-9.

26. Michael J. Tucker, "Canada's Roles in the Disarmament Negotiations 1957-1971," Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1977, pp. 81,86 and n. 72.

27. Granatstein, *Man of Influence*, p. 339.

28. DEA, File 50210-F-40, Robertson to Léger, 10 August 1959.

29. DEA, Historical Division, Howard Green interview, Vancouver, 2 March 1980.

30. Granatstein, *Man of Influence*, p. 341.

31. DEA, File 11336-10-A-40, Ross Campbell to Under-Secretary, 3 May 1961.

32. Granatstein, *Man of Influence*, pp. 343-9.

33. PAC, Marcel Cadieux Papers, MG31 E31. Vol. 2, Cadieux to Under-Secretary, 21 April 1959.

scheme of educational development directed to the francophone states of Africa which became independent in 1960. Other interested agencies, including the one directly responsible for overseas assistance, the External Aid Office, had doubts about this proposal. The principal concern, according to a leading critic, was whether the federal government could mount a programme in French without further preparation. Cadieux's arguments, however, carried the day with Green, whose ministerial jurisdiction included the aid office as well as External Affairs. But Green did not accept them completely, for he feared that the proposed outlay, \$600,000, would be considered too high by cabinet, and at his suggestion it was reduced by one-half.<sup>34</sup> This was a judgement founded on experience, for there were a number of objections recorded in the Cabinet Conclusions to this kind of expenditure, especially on nonfood aid to countries outside the Commonwealth. In this instance, cabinet, no doubt influenced by "informal representations" which some ministers had received in favour of such a scheme, gave its approval, but only with the observation that even the amount of \$300,000 might be "disproportionately high when compared with the amounts allocated for other programmes."<sup>35</sup>

Notwithstanding the strength and the independence of bureaucratic control that Green displayed in handling such issues as disarmament and aid, the prime minister remained a potent force in the determination of foreign policy. By the time Green became minister, Diefenbaker was well equipped to assert his authority, for his normal experience of office had been reinforced by his world tour at the end of 1958. He also kept up his independent sources of information. The Prime Minister's Office received copies of all departmental memoranda to the minister, and later it requested copies of telegrams signed by Green and the under-secretary on certain sensitive subjects, including disarmament and nuclear tests.<sup>36</sup> Diefenbaker did not use these resources to become involved across the board in Green's area of activity, but he was active on a limited range of issues which interested him personally or were relevant to his role as prime minister.

Diefenbaker's personal interest and style, the product of his concern for democratic rights, his sensitivity to the views of Canadians of Eastern European origin and his fondness for direct and forceful language, had a marked effect on his government's approach to East-West relations. The Department of External Affairs favoured the soft line taken by the previous government and at first continued under Diefenbaker. This position, it was noted, was agreeable to Green because of his desire to promote an accommodating attitude towards disarmament in the Soviet Union. Diefenbaker, however, came to prefer a more vigorous approach, to which he gave expression in his address to the United Nations General Assembly in 1960. The effect of his involvement is clear from the evolution of the text, which started life in External Affairs in the expectation that it would be given by Green. While expressing concern about recent deterioration in the international situation, his version did not assign blame to either side,

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34. DEA, File 8260-15-40, Under-Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs (hereinafter SSEA), 7 November 1960.

35. PCO Records, Cabinet Conclusions, 10 April 1961.

36. DEA, File 11246-40, Far Eastern Division memorandum, 5 June 1959; File 10513-40, United Nations Division to Office of Under-Secretary, 9 March 1960.

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and about half the text dealt with disarmament and related matters.<sup>37</sup> Diefenbaker then supplanted Green because of the decision of Khrushchev and a number of other heads of government to attend. Even before he was aware of Khrushchev's text, Diefenbaker was contemplating an attack on the Soviet Union's policies towards the Ukraine, the Baltic states and the European satellites.<sup>38</sup> Notwithstanding Khrushchev's denunciation of Western colonial policies, the officers in External Affairs responsible for drafting the speech were unenthusiastic about this approach. While they responded to Khrushchev by putting the onus for international tension on the Soviet Union,<sup>39</sup> they thought the speech would have the most useful effect if Diefenbaker took on the role of peacemaker. When he was unwilling to give up the offensive, the speechwriters then saw their task as marrying the prime minister's desire for pungent language with a text that would not itself become a cause of further deterioration in relations with the Soviet Union. This they did with reasonable success. A contributor remembered that Diefenbaker was pleased with the result, the speech was well received at home, and reports to the Department of External Affairs suggested a friendly response from Canada's allies.<sup>40</sup> Even so, by incorporating a stern critique of "Soviet colonialism" as a major theme, the speech marked a significant departure from past practice, and introduced an important new component into the Diefenbaker government's position on East-West relations.

Two actions followed from Diefenbaker's speech of 1960. One was his decision to acknowledge the consular status claimed by representatives of the Baltic states, strongly indicated during the election campaign of 1962. This went against the advice of External Affairs, which feared complications in dealing with the power in control of the territories, the Soviet Union, on matters of interest to Canadians.<sup>41</sup> Diefenbaker, who remembered the department for insensitivity to "the terrible persecutions behind the Iron Curtain," may well have regarded this advice as bureaucratic obstruction, part of a pattern going back to his expression of interest in the Baltic states early in his administration.<sup>42</sup> Certainly he suspected that such obstruction was a factor in the difficulties encountered in achieving his second objective, a resolution by the United Nations General Assembly in 1962 based on his earlier attack on Soviet policies.<sup>43</sup> In response to his criticism, the department made an intense effort to promote the resolution in friendly nations, but the response was negative and in due course cabinet decided that the

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37. DEA, File 5475-DW-74-40, United Nations Division to Under-Secretary, 15 September 1960, and enclosure. I have benefitted in preparing this account from a review of the files by Anne Hillmer.

38. Diefenbaker Centre, Diefenbaker Papers, Bryce to Prime Minister, 23 September 1960.

39. DEA, File 5475-DW-70-40, New York (UN) to External, 23 September 1960, telegram 1541.

40. Richard A. Preston, *Canada in World Affairs, 1959 to 1961* (Toronto, 1965), pp. 270-1; DEA, Files 5475-DW-70-40 and 5475-DW-74-40.

41. DEA, File 26-BEU-40, Under-Secretary to SSEA, 8 May 1962; File 633-40, Under-Secretary to Prime Minister, 8 May 1962. I have been assisted in dealing with this question by an account by D.M. Page.

42. Diefenbaker Centre, Diefenbaker interview with John Munro, 4 December 1974; DEA, File 663-40, Under-Secretary to SSEA, 4 December 1957.

43. PAC, Robertson Papers, MG30 E163, Vol. 18, Office of SSEA to Under-Secretary, 3 July 1962.

initiative ought to be dropped.<sup>44</sup> Diefenbaker settled instead for a campaign of speech-making, but he made certain that it was based upon the tone he had favoured in 1960. While the opening salvo by Green was fairly mild, the climatic speech, delivered by his parliamentary secretary, Heath Macquarrie, was not. The first version of Macquarrie's speech, when submitted to the prime minister for approval, was rejected as "pusillanimous;"<sup>45</sup> as redrafted, it was described by the mission in New York as "the harshest and most direct attack ever levelled against Soviet colonialism in the UN."<sup>46</sup>

Diefenbaker's personal interests came together with his responsibility for dealing with other heads of government in the matter of South Africa's continued membership of the Commonwealth after it became a republic. As a civil libertarian with a rather stark view of right and wrong, Diefenbaker was not entirely comfortable with advice from the Department of External Affairs that Canada seek to avoid confrontation with South Africa over apartheid in the hope that, if lines of communication were kept open, the moderate forces in the country might operate to some effect.<sup>47</sup> Diefenbaker's party, however, was also identified with support for the old Commonwealth, and he did not feel strong pressure to depart from the course favoured by External Affairs until the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960.<sup>48</sup> Even then there was no clear alternative. Bryce hoped that, to ensure the survival of the Commonwealth as a multiracial organisation, Canada might take the lead in pressing for the exclusion of South Africa, but there was not sufficient support from the Canadian cabinet or other Commonwealth leaders for Diefenbaker to take this line at the meeting of heads of government in 1960.<sup>49</sup> Instead, circumstances encouraged him to follow the recommendation of External Affairs that he try to exploit Canada's potential as a conciliator between South Africa and her critics<sup>50</sup> and to exercise his favourite strategy of playing for time in the hope that the problem would be overtaken by events. With material assistance from Diefenbaker, the heads of government agreed to postpone their decision on South Africa's continued membership until a referendum on republican status had been taken there.<sup>51</sup>

Diefenbaker's position was no easier when the Commonwealth heads of government met again in March of 1961, after the referendum held in South Africa had approved a republic. Most ministers in Ottawa wanted South Africa readmitted, while the position of a number of other heads of government was difficult to predict.<sup>52</sup> Diefenbaker was attracted by the possibility of postponing a decision yet again, on the ground — supplied by his high commissioner in London, George Drew — that no action was necessary until the constitutional change in South Africa, not due until after the Commonwealth

44. PCO Records, Cabinet Conclusions, 6 September 1962.

45. DEA, File 11389-A-40, Prime Minister's Office to Under-Secretary, 16 November 1962.

46. Ibid., New York (UN) to External, 24 November 1962, telegram 2370.

47. See, for example, DEA, File 6230-40, Basil Robinson to Commonwealth Division, 20 February 1959. I am grateful to F.J. McEvoy for a study which he has prepared on this subject.

48. DEA, File 11827-40, Robinson to Commonwealth Division, 8 April 1960.

49. DEA, File 50085-H-40, Bryce to Prime Minister, 18 April 1960.

50. See, for example, ibid., External to London, 7 May 1960, telegram K-164.

51. John G. Diefenbaker, *One Canada: The Years of Achievement* (Toronto, 1976), pp. 210-2.

52. PCO records, Cabinet Conclusions, 11 and 25 February and 9 March 1961.

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meeting, had actually taken place.<sup>53</sup> By this time, however, Diefenbaker may well have developed a fall-back position: the creation of a situation which would force South Africa to solve the problem itself by withdrawing from the Commonwealth rather than accept onerous terms for continued membership. He had suspected, since his first heads of government meeting in 1957, that "South Africa did not want to remain long in the Commonwealth,"<sup>54</sup> and he had reason to believe that a declaration in support of racial equality, favoured by External Affairs as a means of placating South Africa's critics,<sup>55</sup> might be a means of getting her out. External Affairs had alerted him to this possibility, and a recent speech by Prime Minister Verwoerd suggested that he might be preparing his people for withdrawal if he could not remain in the Commonwealth on the terms he wanted.<sup>56</sup>

Diefenbaker was not able to take the initiative in promoting this solution because cabinet was against Canadian sponsorship of a Commonwealth declaration of rights. Such action, ministers believed, "would probably provoke ridicule" at home since the Canadian Bill of Rights had not yet been tested.<sup>57</sup> But the idea remained useful when, the day before the discussion of South Africa was to begin, Diefenbaker learned that India, not hitherto expected to take the initiative, had decided on a hard line. A strong statement against apartheid, Diefenbaker suggested to the Indians, would likely cause South Africa to withdraw from the Commonwealth and so avert the necessity for direct action by the other members.<sup>58</sup> Diefenbaker did not mention this reasoning when he reported to cabinet on the early discussion of the issue in London, and his ministers did not give him further guidance.<sup>59</sup> So, although unable to take the lead in formulating a declaration of principles, he remained free to support the efforts of the nonwhite leaders. This produced the result he had anticipated when he learned of the Indian position. Unable to persuade Verwoerd to compromise and concluding that the South African application for continued membership would be rejected by all but Britain, Australia and New Zealand, the British prime minister, Harold Macmillan, secured its withdrawal.<sup>60</sup>

Among Diefenbaker's strengths in dealing with South Africa were his access to well-balanced information and his ultimate control of the decision-making process. These were not always easy to achieve, even on matters involving his relationship with other heads of government. The question of British membership in the European Economic Community was of material interest not only to Diefenbaker but also to the economic ministers and the Secretary of State for External Affairs. Equally important, it was one in which George Drew took a major and sustained interest. During Drew's time at Canada House, subjects in this category were very much the province of the high

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53. DEA, File 50085-J-40, Drew to Prime Minister, 27 February 1961.

54. PCO Records, Cabinet Conclusions, 6 July 1957.

55. DEA, File 50085-J-40, SSEA to Prime Minister, 16 January 1961.

56. *Ibid.*; PCO Records, Cabinet Conclusions, 11 February 1961.

57. PCO Records, Cabinet Conclusions, 9 March 1961.

58. DEA, File 50085-J-40, Bryce, memorandum, 12 March 1961.

59. PCO Records, Cabinet Conclusions, 14 March 1961.

60. Harold Macmillan, *Pointing the Way* (London, 1972), p. 299.

commissioner, who generated a large volume of private telephone calls, telegrams and letters to Diefenbaker and the ministers concerned. In preparing these communications and in carrying out his own activities in Britain, Drew acted on his own, without seeking the advice of his staff or the views of his departmental headquarters. As a former premier of Canada's wealthiest province and a former leader of his party still respected by its establishment, Drew could speak with authority on an economic subject such as the Common Market. He therefore could expect both considerable latitude in the way he handled his office and a receptive audience where it counted most, in cabinet. In short, he was a source of highly potent opinion and advice on the Common Market, which reached ministers uninfluenced by and uncoordinated with that going forward through the bureaucracy.

Drew and the government began to give serious attention to the Common Market in 1960, in response to indications that Britain was planning to apply for membership. What they feared were the possible economic and political consequences if Britain sacrificed Commonwealth preferences in order to meet the requirements of the community: erosion of Canada's competitive position in the British market, a weakening of Commonwealth ties based on shared economic interest, and the loss of a significant counterweight to United States economic and political influence on Canada. The Department of External Affairs, doubtful that the Canadian bargaining position was strong enough to do much about these problems, recommended that the government go to work on contingency plans.<sup>61</sup> Drew's position, founded on the belief that the community's conditions for membership were likely to be unpopular with a substantial element of British opinion, was very different. He favoured a vigorous campaign in Britain, reinforced as appropriate from home, to convince the public that the Canadian and Commonwealth markets were of continued and growing value, combined with a strong effort to get a commitment that British negotiators would protect the Commonwealth interest. The latter produced a public British assurance in May of 1961 of "full consultation" with other Commonwealth governments,<sup>62</sup> a narrow interpretation of which formed the basis of Drew's subsequent action. This approach was more in line with ministerial attitudes in Ottawa than the cautious line favoured by External Affairs. "Too weak!" was Green's comment on guidance prepared in his department for the prime minister.<sup>63</sup>

Drew's view of the British undertaking about consultation was that it might offer a means of thwarting negotiations with the community if they seemed likely to produce a result unfavourable to the Commonwealth. He therefore set a very high standard of what constituted acceptable consultation and counselled his government against accepting anything less. He did not regard a trip to Ottawa in July of 1961 by the Commonwealth Secretary, Duncan Sandys, as meeting his requirements, and his negative comments

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61. DEA, File 12447-40, Under-Secretary to SSEA, 7 September 1960.

62. Ibid., London to Prime Minister, 18 May 1961, telegram 1833. Like many of Drew's recommendations on this subject, this document was not added to the External Affairs file until some years later.

63. Ibid., SSEA to Prime Minister, 2 March 1961 and minute, n.d.

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helped to produce a cool reception for the visitor.<sup>64</sup> When Macmillan, on 31 July, announced his government's intention to open negotiations with the community, Diefenbaker reiterated his preference, already expressed in connection with Sandys's visit, for a Commonwealth heads of government meeting as a forum of consultation. This idea, which would have complicated matters for the British a good deal more than a series of bilateral talks, was not very welcome to them.<sup>65</sup> It was made even less so by a Commonwealth ministerial meeting in Accra in September. There, it was reported, the Canadian ministers of Finance and of Trade and Commerce, Donald Fleming and George Hees, took the lead in mobilising opposition to the British plans.<sup>66</sup>

The bad press which Fleming and Hees received led the cabinet in Ottawa to moderate its position. On the initiative of the minister of Justice, Davie Fulton, it agreed "that Canada should now accept as a fait accompli the United Kingdom decision to try to enter the European Economic Community."<sup>67</sup> This position was smartly communicated to the two ministers and was reflected in the reports which they made to Parliament on their return.<sup>68</sup> Diefenbaker was concerned as well about the reaction in Britain, a fact which led him to believe that Canadian hostility to the negotiations, if continued, might even have the undesired effect of helping Labour to bring down Macmillan's government at the next election.<sup>69</sup> This was not a worry to Drew, who suspected that the criticism of the Canadian ministers in the British press was at least partly inspired by pro-market ministers and officials.<sup>70</sup> He therefore did not follow the line adopted in Ottawa but kept on the offensive, getting into a prolonged argument with the British over their refusal to provide Commonwealth representatives with the full text of their opening statement in negotiations with the community, on the ground that they had agreed with the other parties not to release it.<sup>71</sup> Diefenbaker himself had to instruct Drew to moderate his opposition when the high commissioner's conduct in the dispute received unfavourable public attention in Canada<sup>72</sup> and in the end the struggle proved to have been ill-advised. The text, when it became available as a result of a press leak, turned out to contain nothing of substance which the British had not already revealed in oral briefings and written summaries.<sup>73</sup>

Despite this chastening experience, Drew's name continued to appear in the papers,

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64. Ibid., London to Prime Minister, 2 June 1961, telegram 2005, and *passim*; also Peyton Lyon, *Canada in World Affairs, 1961-1963* (Toronto, 1968), p. 447.

65. DEA, File 12447-40, External to London, 1 August 1961, telegram E-1514; Lyon, *Canada in World Affairs*, pp. 447-8.

66. Ibid., pp. 448-50.

67. PCO Records, Cabinet Conclusions, 14 September 1961.

68. DEA, File 12447-40, External to Accra, 14 September 1961, telegram M67; Lyon, *Canada in World Affairs*, pp. 450-2.

69. PCO Records, Cabinet Conclusions, 26 September 1961.

70. DEA, File 12447-40, London to Minister of Trade and Commerce, 24 September 1961, telegram 3454.

71. Ibid., London to Minister of Finance, 13 October 1961, telegram 3707.

72. See, for example, PCO Records, Cabinet Conclusions, 15 November 1961.

73. DEA, File 12447-40, SSEA to Prime Minister, 28 November 1961 and enclosure.

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although with less frequency, as a source of criticism of the Common Market in Britain.<sup>74</sup> He also maintained the flow of negative comment to Ottawa, notwithstanding British efforts to promote a better relationship with Canada, a policy which included two visits to Ottawa by the minister responsible for negotiations with the community, Edward Heath, and agreement to convene a Commonwealth heads of government meeting.

On the eve of a visit to Ottawa by Macmillan at the end of April 1962, Drew commented alarmingly on the political implications of the British approach to the community. Its success, he warned, would weaken the Commonwealth link and make Canada more vulnerable to control by the United States, an objective he suggested the Americans had in mind in encouraging the British effort.<sup>75</sup> This was not an aspect of the problem that occurred spontaneously to External Affairs, nor was it informed of Drew's concern or asked to comment. But Drew's argument was one to which Diefenbaker was susceptible<sup>76</sup> and it affected his approach to the British, including his preparations for the heads of government meeting. Unlike other Commonwealth leaders, he was not interested in contingency plans against Britain's possible entry. Instead, encouraged by public opinion polls showing low support for the Common Market in Britain, he preferred to hope that the conference would help to change the mind of the government there. Having been warned by officials against placing himself in a position to be blamed if the British bid should fail, he told Green, who accompanied him to London and who also continued to hope Britain would stay out, that they must achieve their objective without "taking the part of the 'dog in the manger'."<sup>77</sup> This proved to be an impossible task, for Diefenbaker had no success with Drew's ideas about expanding Commonwealth trade and the political dangers if Britain joined the community. All he did was to alarm the British and arouse a hostile press in London, and he did not recoup his position by proposing that the Commonwealth take the lead in organising a broader international conference on the lowering of trade barriers. Hence the conference ended without forcing a change upon the British. While the subsequent failure of their application to the community could not be blamed on Canada or the Commonwealth, as officials in Ottawa and Diefenbaker himself had feared might happen, the conference nonetheless did the prime minister more harm than good, by exposing his conduct to savage criticism in the press. It also helped disappoint the Conservatives' hopes for a warm relationship with London, contributing instead to the feeling, noted by a British high commissioner in Ottawa during the period, that there was "something...awry" at the ministerial level.<sup>78</sup>

Diefenbaker might well have had better success in responding to the British negotiations with the European Economic Community had the advice from Drew been better integrated with that from public servants. Disparate advice, this time from

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74. "Mr. Drew Writes a Letter," *Free Press* (Winnipeg), 7 May 1962.

75. DEA, File I2447-40, London to Prime Minister, 29 April 1962, telegram 1588.

76. See, for example, PCO Records, Cabinet Conclusions, 30 August 1962.

77. PAC, Howard Green Papers, MG32 B13, Vol. 9, Diefenbaker to Green, 31 August 1962, and *passim*; PCO Records, Cabinet Conclusions, 30 August 1962.

78. Lord Garner, "Britain and Canada in the 1940s and 1950s," in *Britain and Canada*, Peter Lyon, ed. (London, 1976), pp. 99-101; also Peyton Lyon, *Canada in World Affairs*, pp. 463-76.

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different departments, was also a problem in dealing with the issue in external policy which was most troublesome for Diefenbaker's government, the crisis over nuclear weapons. Green's concern for Canada's credibility as an advocate of disarmament brought him into conflict with George Pearkes and his successor as minister of National Defence, Douglas Harkness, over their desire to reach agreement with the United States on the supply of nuclear equipment to the Canadian armed forces for their new weapons systems, and to American bases in Canada. This was an issue on which there had been differences between the departments of External Affairs and National Defence since Pearson's years as minister,<sup>79</sup> but they widened as a result of Green's personal interest in the subject and his approach to his work. Officials in External Affairs who dealt with the problem found that they could not count on Green to accept positions agreed to with their counterparts in National Defence. As a result, the matter became one for resolution between ministers or, if they could not find common ground themselves, by the prime minister. His convictions, as expressed privately at the time, seem to have inclined towards the nuclear side. Although he acknowledged the desirability of disarmament, he was not convinced that it was realisable, and both his view of the Soviet Union and his appreciation of the economic benefits of defence production sharing encouraged a favourable approach to agreement with the United States.<sup>80</sup> But of more pressing concern to him than the substance of the issue were its political implications. The emergence of an organised antinuclear movement in Canada, which could take encouragement from the positions of the three opposition parties, was a factor here, but the greatest cause of difficulty was the division in cabinet. If one or other of the lead ministers were so offended by Diefenbaker's position that he withdrew, possibly taking supporters with him, the government's position obviously could become precarious, especially after it was reduced to a minority in the election of 1962.

For a long time, Diefenbaker was able to control the issue by blurring it, keeping both protagonists somewhat off-base, but that strategy was put to an end by the Cuban missile crisis in October of 1962. By revealing the weakness of Canada's defences resulting from the failure to acquire the weapons required by the new delivery systems, the crisis placed the government under greater pressure to take a decision. It appears, especially from Harkness's account, that Diefenbaker responded first and foremost as a politician under siege, anticipating an early election and anxious to find an issue which might provide a basis for recovering his majority in Parliament. Keeping his cabinet together was an important concern in this endeavour, but it was not the only one.

Harkness took advantage of the situation created by the missile crisis to secure cabinet agreement to proceed with negotiations with the United States about acquiring nuclear equipment for use both in Canada and by Canadian forces in Europe. Green did not cause serious difficulties about the latter. Because of his attitude, however, the

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79. George Ignatieff, "Secrecy and Democratic Participation in the Formulation and Conduct of Canadian Foreign Policy," in *Secrecy and Foreign Policy*, Thomas M. Franck and Edward Weisband, eds. (New York, 1974), p. 56.

80. See, for example, PCO Records, Cabinet Conclusions, 14 January 1960; Jocelyn Maynard Ghent, "Canadian-American Relations and the Nuclear Weapons Controversy, 1958-1963", Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1976, pp. 81-3 and 116-22.

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government took the position that weapons for use in Canada, or vital parts of them, should be stored in the United States and moved across the border in an emergency. When meetings with the Americans failed to produce a workable arrangement for doing so, Diefenbaker held off making changes for the forces in Europe alone, arguing that he wanted to announce a solution to the whole problem at once. The objective as he saw it was to find a formula that could be used to the government's advantage in an election. An idea that appealed to him was to reach a comprehensive agreement with the United States and make that the issue in going to the country to restore the government's majority. This course, however, was opposed not only by Green but even by pronuclear ministers, who did not want to fight on the single issue of acquiring the weapons although they were willing to make it one of the planks in a campaign platform.<sup>81</sup>

Having failed to carry the idea of a pronuclear campaign, Diefenbaker, encouraged by the antinuclear bias of his mail,<sup>82</sup> found renewed attraction in seeking votes from the other side. Pearson's announcement on 12 January 1963, that he had decided that Canada was obligated to accept nuclear weapons, provided Diefenbaker with an obvious opportunity to appeal to antinuclear sentiment, but to do so he had to resist strong pressure to accept the logic of Pearson's reasoning. One source was the statement of the retiring supreme commander of NATO forces in Europe, General Lauris Norstad, that Canada ought to provide the nuclear equipment required by its forces there; another and more urgent one was Harkness's threat on 20 January to resign from the cabinet if the issue were allowed to remain unresolved until after another election. Diefenbaker's response was to promise a discussion of defence policy in Parliament and to appoint a committee of cabinet to examine the nuclear question. After a close study of the relevant documentation, the other members of the committee persuaded Green to acknowledge, "reluctantly," that Canada had definite obligations to acquire nuclear weapons.<sup>83</sup> The committee then worked out an agreed position for presentation to the prime minister and cabinet. This provided for a request to NATO for clarification of Canada's nuclear role and, if that were reconfirmed, for acquisition of the appropriate weapons. With respect to NORAD, it was agreed that negotiations with the United States would "be continued with a view to reaching agreement to secure the highest degree of availability to Canada."<sup>84</sup>

If Green and Harkness were agreed on the report of the committee, it would seem that Diefenbaker need not have been concerned about an open split in cabinet if he accepted it. It is likely, therefore, that he was more influenced by doubts that a pronuclear position would be effective in an election and by the desire to be able to appear as a proponent of the other side if he considered it advantageous to do so. The outcome of the confused sequence of statement and counterstatement by himself and Harkness at the end of January reinforced these considerations. After the State Department in Washington

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81. PAC, Douglas Harkness Papers, MG36 B19, Vol. 84, "The Nuclear Arms Question and the Political Crisis Which Arose From It in January and February 1963."

82. Ghent, "Did He Fall or Was He Pushed?" *International History Review*, Vol. I (1979), p. 258.

83. Harkness, "Nuclear Policy Muddled by Dief," *Citizen* (Ottawa), 24 October 1977.

84. PAC, Harkness Papers, MG36 B19, Vol. 84, "Nuclear Arms question."

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released a note on 30 January taking issue with Diefenbaker's interpretation of Canada's obligations, he became if anything more resistant to Harkness's position, and informed his colleagues that he wanted to go to the country with an anti-American campaign.<sup>85</sup> Harkness, concluding that there was no hope of progress, carried out his threat to resign on 3 February and the government fell on an opposition vote of confidence two days later. Although he had not kept his cabinet together, Diefenbaker was able to go the people in what he considered the most viable position on the nuclear issue: uncommitted to the nuclear option and able to exploit Canadian resentment of criticism of his actions in the United States.

As events turned out, the election of 1963 was not a single-issue campaign, nor was foreign and defence policy its focal point. According to a Liberal strategist, domestic concerns were of more consistent interest to the voter, and the key to his party's success was concentration the final days of the campaign on the Diefenbaker government's reputation for indecisiveness, for which the Liberals offered an antidote in the form of "sixty days of decision."<sup>86</sup> But the outgoing government had to a considerable extent earned the reputation which helped defeat it in foreign policy, and hence the verdict of the electorate was in a sense a judgement on the way that activity had been conducted. The decision-making process under Diefenbaker enabled ministers to make good use of the bureaucratic resources available to them without giving up their autonomy. It did not guarantee, however, that they would always do so, or that they would keep out of trouble for other reasons. It may well be that the circumstances of Diefenbaker's fall deprived him and his government of credit for their achievements in foreign policy in a time of difficult transition in international affairs. Yet, as the handling of the Common Market and of defence policy shows, the problems were real, and they related as much to the way policy was made and implemented as to the principles on which it was based. It was reasonable, therefore, for the voters to be concerned about the process of making foreign policy when they went to the polls in 1963.

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85. Harkness, "A foolish move," *Citizen* (Ottawa), 25 October 1977.

86. Walter L. Gordon, *A Political Memoir* (Toronto, 1977), pp. 115-6, 120-1 and 125-7.