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N. W. ROWELL AND CANADA'S EXTERNAL POLICY, 1917-1921

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When N. W. Rowell entered the Union Government of Sir Robert Borden in 1917 he had probably given more thought to the problems of Canada's external relations than any member of the new coalition except Borden himself. During the next three and a half years Rowell was influential in shaping the policies which secured the world's recognition of Canadian nationhood and he emerged as one of the most articulate and passionate exponents of post-war nationalism in English-speaking Canada.

Newton Wesley Rowell, who was born in 1867, came of English-Irish stock and grew up in a hard-working and prosperous farming community in Middlesex County, Ontario, where he was reared in the traditions of western Ontario Liberalism and the Methodist church. Many residents of the province first heard Rowell on missionary and temperance platforms before they met him as a Liberal politician. He early overcame the handicap of a rather thin, high-pitched voice and acquired a reputation as an excellent speaker. His earnestly delivered addresses were always thoroughly prepared and often well sprinkled with statistics, but rarely distinguished for their humour. As a young man he had, like most Victorian Canadians, strong convictions about the providential civilizing mission of the Anglo-Saxon peoples and the universal benefits bestowed by the Pax Britannica. But his keen awareness of the British heritage did not prevent him from being first of all a Canadian, and especially after his first trip across Canada to the Pacific coast in 1890 he was strong in the belief that in the future he would be a citizen of one of the world's greatest nations. He rejected all the versions of imperial federation which were current in the last decade of the nineteenth century when he began the practice of law in Toronto, for they seemed incompatible with the growing sense of a Canadian identity. Yet he was emotionally and intellectually committed to the proposition that it was primarily through the Empire, under a formula not yet devised, that Canada would begin to play a man's part in the world.

During his first and unsuccessful appeal to the voters in the riding of East York in the federal election of 1900 Rowell declared that the Boer War had ushered in a new era in imperial relations. He originally intended to suggest that the Canadian contribution

"must be a precedent",[1] but in the end he deleted from his speech this rejection of Laurier's claim that it should not be considered a precedent. Instead, Rowell called for a fresh realization of the unity of the Empire and spoke of the establishment of an imperial "consultative council" or a body growing "less directly from our present form of government" as a desirable development in the future.[2] A decade later when some of his Liberal colleagues in Toronto thought his imperialist sentiments and his material interests should have overcome his agrarian origins to lead him out of the Liberal party over the reciprocity issue, Rowell preached a gospel of independent Canadianism and charged the Conservatives with giving the world the impression that "the loyalty of Canadians is a purchasable quantity and depends on trade advantage".[3]

When the pre-war debate on naval defence forced Canadians to face the practical difficulties and responsibilities of membership in an insecure Empire Rowell immediately espoused the cause of a separate Canadian navy; indeed, he claimed later that he advocated this policy before Laurier adopted it.[4] With the defeat of the Liberals and the beginning of the period of Conservative hesitancy on naval policy Rowell, who was elected leader of the Ontario Liberal party in November, 1911, lent his support to the non-party agitation which developed in Ontario on behalf of a more positive attitude toward Canadian responsibility in naval defence. At the end of the summer of 1912 Rowell joined with Joseph Atkinson of *The Toronto Star* and the three Toronto members of the federal Conservative cabinet in addressing the great non-party banquet tendered to Borden by the Toronto Board of Trade on his return from defence consultations in London. Rowell told his audience that as a self-respecting people Canadians should assure Great Britain that they would bear their full share of the defence burden.[5] When Borden announced his Naval Aid Bill, Rowell voiced no strong disapproval. The worst that he would say of the measure was that it did not go far enough; he regretted that "Canada is not manning and maintaining, as well as giving these dreadnoughts".[6] Nor did Rowell attack Borden's commitment to consultation on foreign policy as the logical accompaniment of financial aid. He confined himself to warning that the Committee on Imperial Defence, a body responsible only to the British prime minister, must not be allowed to take over the policy making functions which rightly belonged to the Imperial Conferences.[7]

1 Public Archives of Canada, Rowell Papers, Ms. of speech, September 19, 1900.
2 *The Globe*, September 20, 1920.
3 *Ibid.*, April 7, 1911.
4 Rowell Papers, Rowell to J. W. Dafoe, January 29, 1920.
5 *The Globe*, September 24, 1912.
6 *Ibid.*, December 7, 1912.
7 Rowell's anxiety on this score was not unfounded, since foreign policy had

Rowell thought the consultation provided for in the conferences was adequate for the time being, but when Canada had a population two or three times the present size she would not be satisfied with a foreign policy which would still be made primarily in Britain. There would then be four paths open to Canadians: independence, the continuation of the present relationship, "the development of a great co-operative alliance . . . as advocated by Mr. Jebb", or the formation of "a new central organization . . . to control the external affairs of the Empire". Those who saw only the first and last as live options lacked imagination, in Rowell's view. Under new conditions might not a great British alliance be possible? But the pace must not be forced; acceptance of the machinery of the present imperial conference might allow it to develop so that "with the Crown and the Throne" it would become "the central and unifying organization of the Empire".[8]

The outbreak of war pushed speculation about the future structure of the Empire into the background for Rowell, as for most Canadians. No political leader appeared more frequently on the recruiting platforms of Ontario. From the first Rowell urged "equality of sacrifice" in a war which was Canada's cause as much as Britain's, since it was fought for the preservation of democracy and Christian civilization. While the Second Division was being organized Rowell was declaring that Canada must put 300,000 men in the field, and in August, 1915, when the government was struggling to recruit 150,000 men, he asserted that to equal Britain's record Canada should have half a million men at the front or in training. In the summer of 1916 the financial support of a group of Toronto Liberals and the co-operation of Canadian military authorities made possible a visit to the front. This experience was undoubtedly one of the most moving of Rowell's life; it enhanced his awareness of Allied man-power needs and gave fresh authority and emotional appeal to his discussion of war policy. In February, 1917 he publicly advocated military conscription; by May of that year he was convinced that only a coalition government could secure equality of sacrifice within the nation and save Canada's good name abroad. He believed that under the existing leadership there was a strong possibility that reinforcements for the men at the front would not be forthcoming, and this, in his view, would be tantamount to ignominious withdrawal from the war. After he and other English-speaking Liberals had failed to persuade Laurier to accept Borden's coalition offer of June, 1917, Rowell indicated his willingness to enter

been discussed in the Defence Committee in 1911. See G. P. de T. Glazebrook, *A History of Canadian External Relations* (Toronto, 1950), p. 273.

[8] Rowell Papers, Ms. of address at Owen Sound, May 16, 1913. The works of Richard Jebb appear to have influenced Rowell's thinking and he quoted Jebb frequently.

a coalition himself if representative Liberals from the rest of Canada did so too.

There was one group in Canada whose members had not allowed the practical necessities of the war to distract them from theories of Empire — the Round Table movement. Rowell's pre-war talk of imperial consultation, his general imperialistic fervor during the war, and his occasional attendance at Round Table study groups apparently convinced the leaders of the movement that he shared their hope that war-time co-operation might lay the basis for an imperial constitution.[9] As part of their programme to popularize their views the leading spirits of the Toronto Round Table group organized a large public meeting and invited Rowell to be one of the speakers. After Sir Joseph Flavelle had expounded the merits of an imperial parliament, Rowell struck a contrary note. He declared that the way forward lay through co-operation rather than through centralization; it was essential "to save the Empire before we try to reorganize it... We are warring for ideals, not for organizations".[10] Although the sponsors of the meeting were bitterly disappointed in Rowell's performance and thought that he had been carried away by "the party feeling being carefully worked up by *The Globe*",[11] Sir John Willison urged them to continue their efforts to secure Rowell's "adhesion to the creed of closer union", since, in Willison's view, he was likely to be the next leader of the Liberal party in Canada.[12]

* * *

In Borden's initial consideration of the allocation of portfolios in the Union Government he thought of taking the unusual step of separating the Department of External Affairs from the Prime Minister's office and asking Rowell to be Secretary of State for External Affairs as well as President of the Council,[13] but in the end he kept the position himself and Rowell became President of the Council and vice-chairman of the war committee of the cabinet. Borden immediately began to lean heavily on Rowell's judgment on external affairs. This was not surprising, since it was already clear that Rowell's thinking in this area of policy paralleled Borden's closely; their

[9] For a discussion of the activities of the group during the war see James Eayrs, "The Round Table Movement in Canada, 1909-1920" *(Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. XXXVIII, March, 1957).

[10] *The Globe*, April 28, 1917.

[11] University of Toronto Library, Sir Edmund Walker Papers, Walker to Hume Cronyn, May 2, 1917. I am grateful to the executors of the estate of Sir Edmund Walker for permission to use the Walker Papers.

[12] *Ibid.*, Willison to Walker, May 16, 1916.

[13] Public Archives of Canada, Borden Papers, OC 573, rough notes re cabinet organization. This division of labour would have required a special act of parliament, since a statute of 1912 (2 Geo. V, C. 22) made the prime minister directly responsible for the Department of External Affairs.

exchange of ideas was no doubt facilitated by the personal friendship which quickly developed between the two men. When Borden asked Rowell rather than Sir George Foster to join the Canadian delegation to the Imperial War Cabinet and Conference in the summer of 1918, pangs of jealousy stirred in Foster's breast, for he considered himself the indispensable guardian of the imperial tie.[14]

In Rowell's own mind he went to London chiefly in his capacity as vice-chairman of the cabinet's war committee to secure information for the more efficient mobilization of the Canadian war effort. In England he shared Borden's disillusionment at "the incompetency, disorganization and confusion at the front",[15] and was appalled at the apparent absence of any sense of urgency about the civilian war effort.[16] Shortly after his arrival he observed: "They are not accustomed to do business over here as expeditiously as we do".[17] A month later he was even more exasperated and complained to the assistant secretary of the War Cabinet, L. S. Amery, that the man-power situation had not even been discussed in the War Cabinet and that he was still unable to get information from British officials on several essential matters; he deplored "the policy of drift" and declared that if the Allies failed, which he now thought not impossible, it would not be the fault of the rank and file fighting men; rather, it could be attributed to "a failure of leadership and organization".[18]

During the London meetings Meighen and Calder took most of the responsibility for the Canadian representation at the Imperial Conference, while Borden and Rowell attended the War Cabinet, although there was some interchange of these duties. In the War Cabinet Rowell upheld and at some points strengthened Borden's determination to adhere to the policy enunciated in Resolution IX of 1917. Thus when Lloyd George advanced his three-point programme for the improvement of relations within the Empire Rowell accepted only part of it. Since it carried no threat to dominion autonomy he found no fault with the plan of Hughes and Lloyd George for direct communication between the British and dominion prime ministers. But he urged that if it were agreed to adopt Lloyd George's suggestion that the Imperial War Cabinet meet regularly with resident dominion ministers in attendance except when the prime ministers were in London, Canada should insist that each dominion be allowed to appoint to the War Cabinet an assistant secretary who would have access to all official papers. Borden evidently did not feel as strongly

[14] Public Archives of Canada, Foster Diary, May 10 and May 20, 1918.
[15] Henry Borden (ed.), *Robert Laird Borden: His Memoirs* (2 vols., Toronto, 1938), II, p. 813.
[16] Rowell Papers, Rowell to T. A. Crerar, A. E. Ames, and A. K. Maclean, June 28, 1918.
[17] *Ibid.*, Rowell to J. D. Reid, June 26, 1918.
[18] *Ibid.*, Rowell to Amery, July 23, 1918.

as Rowell on this stipulation and the matter was not pressed. On a third proposal from Lloyd George, that a committee be established at once to begin consideration of the future organization of the Empire, Rowell was adamant and urged Borden not to acquiesce in a course which he was sure would be disapproved by most Canadians.[19]

On several other issues Rowell defended the maintenance of the status quo until the end of the war. He opposed the Australian proposal for an Imperial Court of Appeal on the grounds that Canadians were satisfied with the treatment their cases received from the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and that any desire for a change was all in the direction of the limitation of appeals to British courts and the establishment of Canadian courts as the final authority.[20] Rowell was as annoyed as Borden by the sudden announcement of the Colonial Secretary, Walter Long, that a plan for imperial preference had been approved by the Imperial War Cabinet. Since the subject had not been discussed at the current meetings the Canadians naturally suspected that Long's action was a manœuvre to force their hand. The question was not one which should concern the Imperial War Cabinet at all, said Rowell: "We have always maintained our own fiscal independence; ... if ... [the British Government] ... should choose to give us this preference well and good, but to have it announced as a decision of the Imperial War Cabinet might lead to misunderstanding ..." [21]

While the War Cabinet was in session the Admiralty tried to secure consideration of a plan for a central imperial navy. Borden, like C. C. Ballantyne, the Minister of Marine, Fisheries, and Naval Service, was willing to discuss the general outline of a scheme which would give Canada control of her navy in peace-time and would allow for joint control with Britain in time of war.[22] Rowell opposed any discussion of the problem. Moreover, he attached great significance to a point which, in Borden's eyes, was a technicality of minor importance, i.e. the manner in which Canada's control of her navy should be handed over to the Admiralty. For Rowell it was of the utmost importance that the transfer should not take place automatically, but "only by a proclamation or other action of the Governor-in-Council", a method which would constitute "a fuller recognition of our right to control our own affairs".[23] Rowell won his point and the naval issue was not discussed.

[19] *Ibid.*, Rowell memorandum re discussions with Borden, L. S. Amery, and Philip Kerr, July 25, 1918.

[20] Maurice Ollivier (ed.), *The Colonial and Imperial Conferences from 1887-1937* (3 vols., Ottawa, 1954), II, p. 306 f.

[21] Rowell Papers, Rowell memorandum re discussion with Borden, July 26, 1918. For Borden's account of this incident see *Memoirs*, II, p. 838 ff.

[22] Rowell Papers, Ballantyne to Rowell, October 22, 1919.

[23] *Ibid.*, Rowell memorandum re discussion with Borden, July 26, 1918.

There was one area in which Rowell was prepared to move ahead immediately, and this was inconsistent with his general desire to maintain the existing constitutional order. He wanted some formal recognition that the Governors-General of the dominions were representatives of the Crown only, and not of the British government. An acknowledgement of what was already the practice would, he said, satisfy "the strong national sentiment in the dominions, which should receive some expression consistent with the unity of the Empire". He thought this change could be made very simply; all that was needed was a decision by the Imperial War Cabinet and a communication to the Governors-General to that effect. Although the Colonial Secretary, Long, agreed that this step was inevitable, he was in no hurry to take it, and protested that consultations with the Governors-General would be necessary. In spite of further argument from Borden and Hughes in favour of the change, the matter was dropped.[24] We may speculate on the effect that the recognition of this principle in 1918 might have had on the constitutional theories of Mackenzie King in 1926, and of Rowell, who supported King in that controversy.

The approach of the Peace Conference presented the first concrete test of the claim which Rowell had made constantly on the public platform throughout the war — that a creditable war effort would constitute a charter of full nationhood. While Canada's status hung in the balance in Europe one wing of the Cabinet, led by Meighen, argued that whatever Borden's official role at the Peace Conference it would in effect be a secondary one, and therefore much less important than his leadership in the session of parliament due to begin in February, 1919.[25] Rowell was the most vigorous upholder of the opposite view: Borden should come home for the session only if Canada failed to win "direct full representation"; any other form of representation would be unacceptable to the Canadian people, and politically dangerous to the Union Government.[26]

When it appeared that Canada would be accorded the same status as the smaller nations at the Conference, Rowell thought the proposal an insult. In an outburst of feeling he informed Borden that Canada's position should not be assessed as that of a nation of eight millions, but of the fifty millions she would soon possess, and "thus, potentially, at least, one of the Great Powers"; her future, plus the record of her troops, justified her in demanding a status "equal to that of any other representatives of the Britannic nations

[24] Borden Papers, Memoir Notes, Minutes of the Imperial War Cabinet, July 25, 1918.

[25] *Ibid.*, OC 509, Meighen to Borden, December 17, 1918.

[26] Rowell Papers, Rowell to Borden, December 24, 1918. Rowell sometimes implied that he would regard representation within the British Empire delegation as sufficient but there is no doubt that he preferred separate representation.

or of the American nation".[27] By the time Borden replied he was in Paris and all was well for the moment.

Granted recognition, what contribution would Canada make to the councils of the nations? In public and private Rowell had maintained in Wilsonian tones that since Canada alone of the British countries had no territorial ambitions, and thus occupied a position similar to that of the United States, she had "a special responsibility to keep in their supreme place the moral issues for which we entered the conflict . . ." [28] But what would so unexceptional a principle mean for the solution of the ethnic puzzles of eastern Europe or the question of German reparations? Did Canada have anything to say on the specific issues of the treaties? Professor G. M. Wrong of the Department of History at the University of Toronto was one of the handful of Canadians who were bothered by this question. Wrong proposed to Rowell that the Canadian delegation in London should have the assistance of a group of Canadian scholars similar to the American advisory committee headed by Colonel House.[29] He found Rowell receptive to the idea, although fearful that it might be too late; however, when the idea was put to Borden he said that it was unnecessary and indeed impossible for Canadian scholars to duplicate the detailed studies of the problems of the peace done by the British Foreign Office.[30] Wrong described this reaction as "the truly colonial attitude of mind . . . Canada goes to the Peace Conference with no opinions of her own on these matters. That is to say she goes as a colony not as a nation".[31] Rowell found this unduly pessimistic. The Canadian viewpoint had been expressed "clearly and forcibly" at recent imperial conferences and would be again at Paris, with or without the aid of Canadian scholarship.[32] However, Rowell made a modified proposal — that just one or two university men, such as Professor Wrong and President Falconer of the University of Toronto, should be attached to the Canadian delegation; they would keep in touch with the House Committee and the Foreign Office and make information from those sources more easily available to Borden.[33] In the meantime Borden had been confirmed in his rejection of the plan by a memorandum from Loring Christie on the House Committee,

[27] Borden Papers, OC 509, Rowell to Borden, December 26, 1918.
[28] Rowell Papers, Rowell to Borden, July 26, 1918.
[29] *Ibid.*, Wrong to Rowell, November 13, 1918.
[30] *Ibid.*, Rowell to Wrong, November 16, 1918. Rowell and Wrong, like Borden, seem to have missed the significance of the fact that the basic structure of the peace had been settled on November 4, 1918, when the Supreme War Council accepted the armistice terms based on Wilson's Fourteen Points, and that the British government had made no attempt to secure the approval of the dominions. F. H. Soward, "Sir Robert Borden and Canada's External Policy" *(Canadian Historical Association Report,* 1941), p. 75.
[31] Rowell Papers, Wrong to Rowell, November 18, 1918.
[32] *Ibid.*, Rowell to Wrong, November 27, 1918.
[33] *Ibid.*, Rowell to Borden, December 7, 1918.

which described this "somewhat mysterious committee of professors" as a mere collector of information, lacking access to the most secret State Department materials, and so unrelated to the actual machinery of government as to be almost useless in the formation of policy.[34] Moreover, Borden's experience in the last six weeks had convinced him that British information was not only adequate, but uncoloured in any way that could prejudice Canadian interests.[35] Thus Canadian professors had no ringside seats at the Peace Conference.

The journalists fared better, or at least one of them, J. W. Dafoe, did. Borden and Rowell both feared that it would be impossible to carry public opinion in favour of Borden's prolonged sojourn in London and Paris, and that the significance of the status the Union Government had won for Canada would be lost upon the world, and the voters, unless there were adequate publicity for the Canadian role in the Peace Conference. Therefore, as the minister responsible for the Department of Public Information, Rowell secured the services of Dafoe as a semi-official correspondent charged with supplying the Canadian Press with a first-hand account of the Peace Conference.[36] He could not have found an editor with opinions more like his own and Borden's on the immediate issues involving Canadian status. But Dafoe's appointment failed to solve the public relations problem. Within three months Rowell was complaining to Borden that Canadian newspapers were filled with despatches from American correspondents who played up Wilson's role in the conference, paid some attention to Lloyd George and Clemenceau, but rarely mentioned Borden; although Dafoe's material was excellent it was comment rather than straight news, and being less sensational than the American despatches it failed to hit the front pages.[37] Rowell made little progress with his renewed efforts to ensure that Canadians received their news from Canadian sources, and as quickly as they got it from the American news services. As the end of the Peace Conference approached he went to some trouble to see that the 8,000 word summary of the treaty would be put on the cables for Ottawa and Washington at precisely the same time, but he reluctantly accepted Borden's opinion that the Canadian government would not be justified in spending $90,000 to have the whole text of 150,000 words sent directly to

[34] *Ibid.*, copy of memorandum for Borden from Loring Christie, n.d. Christie, who was officially Legal Adviser to the Department of External Affairs, was in fact the sole member of the professional staff of the department at this time.

[35] *Ibid.*, Borden to Rowell, January 1, 1919.

[36] *Ibid.*, Rowell to Borden, November 7, 1918; Borden Papers, OC 577, Rowell to Borden, November 19, 1918; M. E. Nichols, *(CP) The Story of the Canadian Press* (Toronto, 1948), p. 151.

[37] Rowell Papers, Rowell to Borden, February 6 and March 14, 1918.

Ottawa and that this would have to be received second-hand through New York.[38] The new nationalism thus suffered a minor defeat.

* * *

A desire for increased influence in the Empire and prestige in the world were the dominant motives in the important part which Rowell played in one of the side-shows of the war — Canada's participation in the Allied intervention in Siberia. From the first suggestion of the British authorities that Canada might contribute to the British forces in Siberia Rowell, although he had some misgivings, was more favourably disposed toward the undertaking than any of the rest of the cabinet except Borden.[39] Although he was present at discussions in London in the summer of 1918 when representatives of a Russian trading company outlined the possibilities for the development of Canadian trade in Siberia, he does not appear to have been carried away by the fantastic dreams of extensive Canadian economic penetration of Russia which captivated Borden for a time and tended to obscure in his mind the objections raised by other members of the cabinet.[40] Rowell's chief apprehensions arose from the differing policies of Britain and the United States. Britain asserted publicly that intervention was aimed at opening up the eastern front to prevent the German occupation of much of Russia; on the other hand the United States disclaimed any such positive military purpose and announced as the primary objective the rescue of the Czech troops who were skirmishing with the Bolsheviks from the Urals to Vladivostok. As always, any threat of conflict between the policies of Britain and the United States was enough to make Canada think twice. In this case the possibility that such a conflict might develop was increased by the participation of the Japanese in the intervention; if they were to disagree with the Americans and invoke the Anglo-Japanese alliance where would Canada be then? In view of these considerations Rowell cautioned Borden that if Canada were to be involved, the venture must be explained to the Canadian people and the precise relationship of the Canadian forces to those of the other allies defined.[41] It was the government's misfortune that it was never able to provide this clarification.

[38] Borden Papers, RLB Series, Borden to Rowell, April 29, 1919, and Rowell to Borden, May 1, 1919.

[39] Rowell Papers, Rowell to General P. de B. Radcliffe, War Office, July 11, 1918; Rowell to Borden, August 13, 1918; Borden Papers, OC 518, C. S. Mewburn to Borden, August 13, 1918.

[40] Public Archives of Canada, Foster Papers, Memorandum from C. F. Just to Foster, August 29, 1918. This is the best outline of the Siberian economic scheme; see also Gaddis Smith, "Canada and the Siberian Intervention, 1918-1919" *(American Historical Review,* Vol. LXIV, July, 1959), p. 870 f.

[41] Borden Papers, OC 518, Rowell to Borden, August 9, 1918.

A majority of the Canadian cabinet agreed to support Borden in his willingness to send troops to Siberia, although several members were reluctant to do so. Once the decision was made Rowell emerged as the chief ministerial defender of the action before the country. He justified it on four grounds: Canada would not have done her full duty unless she assisted in the re-opening of the strategic eastern front; the Bolsheviks must be overthrown and Russia must be helped to find "her democratic, liberty-loving, deeply religious soul, and become one of the great new democracies of the century"; through the Canadian economic mission which would probably be sent to Siberia with the troops Canadians could assist the Russians in their task of reconstruction; finally, as one of the emerging powers on the Pacific Ocean Canada was entitled to a "most important voice on all international questions affecting the Pacific, especially that ocean's northern portion".[42] For the present there was no mention of the American desire to save the Czechs, although six months later in the House of Commons Rowell gave this as a major reason for the intervention.[43]

With the coming of the armistice Rowell shared the initial reaction of the rest of the cabinet in Ottawa and agreed that public opinion would no longer sustain the sending of Canadians to Siberia, whence some 800 men had already sailed. From London, Borden, with the support of Doherty, Foster, and Sifton, urged that the troops should go forward as planned. Borden was convinced that British forces were needed to stabilize the newly formed anti-Bolshevik government in Siberia and that Britain herself could not supply them; moreover, the possibility that the Canadians would be involved in any serious fighting was very slight, while the prospects for future trade relations with Siberia were still bright;[44] further, Borden said, "it will be of some distinction to have all the British forces in Siberia under the command of a Canadian officer".[45] Rowell accepted Borden's argument quickly and was its chief exponent in the cabinet;[46] the opposition was formidable, for White, the Acting Prime Minister, and Crerar, Ballantyne, Calder and Reid were all of the opinion that since the war was over the necessity for re-opening the eastern front no longer existed, and that however sound the other reasons for Allied intervention it was "a task for nations more immediately interested in the finances of Russia" and one which would have declining sup-

[42] Rowell Papers, Ms. of address to the Toronto Canadian Club, October 15, 1918. The Canadian Economic Mission to Siberia was appointed on October 21, 1918, and was supplied with an initial credit of $1,000,000 by the government for the opening of trading operations.

[43] *House of Commons Debates*, April 1, 1919, p. 1062 ff.

[44] Borden Papers, OC 518, Borden to White, November 20, 1918.

[45] *Ibid.*, Memoir Notes, Borden to White, November 22, 1918.

[46] Rowell Papers, Rowell to White, November 21, 1918; Senator T. A. Crerar, interview with the author, June 21, 1958.

port from war-weary Canadians.[47] Borden could scarcely deny that these were valid objections, but for him the decisive consideration now was that "Canada's present position and prestige would be singularly impaired" if she withdrew from her commitment to the British government.[48] In the end, the whole cabinet, with the exception of Crerar,[49] agreed to proceed with the expedition and to meet the objections of some of the troops involved and the resistance of the public with a promise that the force would be recalled within a year of the armistice, or the draftees in the contingent replaced by volunteers.[50]

In the face of mounting public opposition this decision placed a heavy responsibility on the Department of Public Information, as Rowell well knew. But repeated appeals from White and Rowell to Borden in London for some intelligible account of Allied policy and the Canadian share in its execution which could be published were of no avail.[51] The British government held that the necessities of military security, the complications of relations among the Allies, and uncertainty about the situation in Russia all made a public statement impossible.[52] Apparently neither White nor Rowell thought it politic to publicize Borden's admission that fulfillment of a promise to the British government was now the only valid reason for continued Canadian participation.[53] Early in the new year Borden accepted the opinion of the majority of his cabinet,[54] who were alarmed anew by the public outcry to bring the troops home, and informed the British government that the Canadians must be withdrawn from Siberia at the earliest possible moment. Meanwhile, on Rowell fell the burden of trying to explain Canadian policy in Siberia before an angry opposition in the House of Commons. Although he used all his earlier public arguments, plus the plight of the Czechs, the dictates of national pride were given priority; since Canada had sent proportionately fewer men into battle than the other dominions and had abandoned all thought of providing a fifth division, and since Britain had been reduced to calling out schoolboys, it was obviously Canada's duty to provide the men requested. To have done

[47] Borden Papers, OC 518, White to Borden, November 26, 1918.

[48] *Ibid.*, Borden to White, November 24, 1918.

[49] *Ibid.*, OC 509, Reid to Borden, November 28, 1918.

[50] *Ibid.*, OC 518, White to Borden, November 28, 1918. Early in January the proportion was: draftees - 36%, volunteers - 54% volunteers for France but not for Siberia - 10%, Rowell Papers, Maj.-Gen. G. W. Gwatkin to Rowell, January 12, 1919.

[51] Borden Papers, OC 515, Rowell to Borden, November 28, 1918; OC 518, White to Borden, December 6 and 7, 1918; Rowell to Borden, December 23, 1918.

[52] Rowell Papers, copy Colonial Secretary to Governor-General, December 12, 1918; Sir Joseph Pope to Rowell, January 14, 1919, relaying message from Colonial Secretary.

[53] *Ibid.*, Borden to White, December 5, 1918.

[54] Unfortunately, I have found no evidence as to whether Rowell had concluded independently that the expedition should be withdrawn.

otherwise would have been inconsistent with Canada's determination to play her part fully in the war, and he could see nothing to regret in the action which had been taken.[55] This appeal to national honour met with little response among most Canadians and Rowell's prominence in the defence of one of the Union Government's most unpopular policies contributed to his political undoing.

As the government's chief spokesman on external relations during Borden's absence at the Peace Conference Rowell had to meet opposition charges that, far from honouring the spirit of Resolution IX, the government had altered Canada's constitutional position without consulting parliament by delegating certain powers to the Imperial War Cabinet. Although he would not agree that any powers had been "delegated", Rowell acknowledged that there had been a change; it was entirely in the direction of enlarging Canadian autonomy, since Canada now had a voice in foreign affairs over which she previously had no control whatever. Further, and contrary to opposition allegations, there could be no doubt about the correctness of the government's procedure, for Borden, like Laurier before him, had participated in the imperial consultations as the representative of a government with a parliamentary majority.[56] Through persistent questioning Ernest Lapointe and C. G. Power of the opposition drew out the possible implications of the policy of consultation by forcing Rowell to admit that it was while he and Borden were attending the Imperial War Cabinet that Canada had first indicated her willingness to take part in the Siberian intervention and that the proposal had originated with the British and not the Canadian ministers.[57]

In the special session of parliament of the autumn of 1919 it fell to Rowell's lot to try to explain the constitutional significance of Canada's separate signature of the peace treaty — no easy task. Against the assertions of some of the opposition members that Canada was not a sovereign nation and had no right to sign the treaty at all, Rowell declared that the treaty was the last great step forward into full nationhood. It was difficult to prove that the Canadian signature was no mere formality and that the treaty would not have been equally binding if signed only by the British ministers, but Rowell asserted that after the passing of the Order-in-Council of April 10, 1919, empowering Canada's representative to sign treaties with any foreign power "the British ministers could not have signed for Canada".[58] Understandably, many members of the House whose nationalism was less highly developed were unconvinced.

[55] *House of Commons Debates*, April 1, 1919, p. 1064.
[56] *Ibid.*, March 11, 1919, p. 362 ff.
[57] *Ibid.*, April 1, 1919, p. 1062.
[58] *Ibid.*, September 9, 1919, p. 118 ff.

But even if it were granted that Canada's autonomy within the Empire had been advanced, was it not true that she had simultaneously placed herself under a new subservience to Geneva, and that the reported resistance of Canada to Article X was an admission of that fact? To this question Rowell replied that the American controversy over Article X had encouraged Canadians to place undue emphasis upon it; the real heart of the Covenant was Article XII, binding all signatories to submit their disputes to arbitration; "in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred", war would thus be avoided; Article X was simply an additional "insurance feature". Further, Canada could be involved in action against an aggressor only with the agreement of the Canadian parliament, which had sole authority to raise troops. There was another safeguard in the fact that if Canada became involved in League action she would automatically become a country of special interest and entitled to a seat on the Council without whose unanimous consent no military action could be taken.[59] Thus Canada was not in bondage to anyone. Rather she had maintained "the splendid position which the troops won for her in the field of battle" and now was sharing in the inauguration of a new world order which would affect Canada "not only to-day with her eight millions of people, but also... when she has from twenty-five to fifty millions, when Canada is not only one of the greatest powers on the Pacific, but one of the great powers of the world".[60]

* * *

The most immediate threat to Canada's place in the sun came not from the structure of the League itself but from the American attitude toward the dominions. During the first two months of 1920, while Rowell was Acting Secretary of State for External Affairs, his attention was focused on Washington where the Lenroot resolution of the previous autumn was now embodied in the Lodge reservations on American acceptance of the League Covenant. Borden had already expressed Canada's hostility to the Lenroot resolution, which would have exempted the United States from adherence to any action or report of the League Council or Assembly in which more than one member of the British Empire had cast a vote, but now that the subject was again under discussion Rowell was alarmed at Canadian apathy. However, Lord Grey, the British Ambassador to the United States, came to the rescue by publicly urging acceptance of the reservation; the result was that some Canadians began to sit up and take notice, much to Rowell's relief.[61] But when even Professor G. M. Wrong wavered on this point Rowell was still apprehensive. Wrong

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 129 f.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 132.
[61] Rowell Papers, Rowell to Wrong, February 4, 1920.

had been persuaded by his friend, ex-president Taft, to consider the possibility that Canada might renounce election to the Council in order to facilitate American acceptance of the League; he got no encouragement from Rowell. Although Rowell admitted that Canada's election to the Council was not imminent, he argued that "we could not disclaim the right without recognizing that we were inferior in status to other members of the League . . ." [62] A further explanation of Taft's view, forwarded by Wrong, drew even sharper comment from Rowell:

> The Lenroot resolution will be looked upon by the Canadian people as a deliberate affront . . . You ask what Canada will do if such a reservation is adopted. There is no question as to what Canada will do nor any question what the other Dominions will do for they feel just as strongly — some of them more strongly, if that be possible — on this matter. She will not only not approve the reservation, but she will protest against it. Under no conditions will she accept it.[63]

A few days later Rowell went even further and told an audience of war veterans that if the American Senate approved the Lenroot resolution and won its acceptance by the other powers Canada would withdraw from the League.[64] Outraged nationalism found further expression in a private letter to the Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba:

> I must say . . . that the cool assumption that the United States is entitled to tell us how and when we shall adjust the internal relations of the different portions of the British Empire is another illustration of the amazing self-conceit of even the best intentioned American who seems to think it his prerogative to settle the affairs of the North American continent.[65]

On yet another issue Rowell found the Americans difficult. He was enthusiastic about the appointment of a Canadian minister to the United States and he and Borden had drafted the original despatch to Lord Milner outlining the form this representation should take. They had received a satisfactory reply: the Canadian minister would be attached to the British Embassy but would be the normal channel of communication between Ottawa and Washington.[66] In discussions later between Loring Christie and the British government it had been agreed that the Canadian minister would rank with the ministers of other countries. However, when Rowell went to Washington in the spring of 1920 he found that both R. C. Lindsay, the Chargé d'Affaires at the British Embassy, and F. L. Polk, American Under Secretary of State, had a different understanding. In discussing with

[62] *Ibid.*

[63] *Ibid.*, Rowell to Wrong, February 12, 1920. In the end Wrong adhered to Rowell's position and expounded it in a letter to *The New York Times*, February 27, 1920.

[64] *The Globe*, February 16, 1920.

[65] Rowell Papers, Rowell to Sir James Aikins, February 23, 1920.

[66] Borden, *Memoirs*, II, p. 1002 ff.

them the announcement of the new representation which Ottawa would shortly make Rowell discovered that they "strongly preferred an announcement which would indicate that the so-called Canadian representation simply meant some internal re-arrangement of the Embassy staff in which Great Britain and Canada alone were interested, rather than an important departure which would enable Canada to deal direct with the American government..." Rowell protested that this was not the meaning attached to the change by Canada;[67] the announcement which was finally made in the House of Commons embodied the Canadian version of the nature of the new arrangement.[68]

When Borden retired from public life in July, 1920, Rowell resigned from the Cabinet, for he now found himself to the left of the majority of the Cabinet on several issues, notably social legislation, taxation policies and the tariff; for the time being he retained his seat in parliament, but did not contest the election of 1921. After his resignation from the government Rowell spent over two months in South Africa, on the suggestion of L. S. Amery, who thought that the fulfillment of a weary Canadian politician's desire for a change, could be used to add to his knowledge of some other part of the Empire. On his way home from South Africa via Suez Rowell received an invitation to serve on the Canadian delegation to the first Assembly of the League of Nations with Sir George Foster and C. J. Doherty. This opportunity to participate in Canada's formal debut in the great world of nations was accepted with alacrity. Borden, who had recommended the appointment to Prime Minister Meighen, was reassured that Rowell would be a member of the delegation, partly because he had doubts about the views of Foster. Borden told Rowell that during the Peace Conference Foster "did not seem to have an adequate conception of Canada's status and nationhood. I... hope... that the steps taken in advance... to which you have contributed so much will not be lost".[69]

In a paper read before this association Professor Gwendolen Carter has already made clear the dominant role which Rowell quickly assumed in the Canadian delegation,[70] and elsewhere she has referred to the high estimate of his ability which many members of the Assembly formed.[71] At Geneva Rowell's primary aim was to support every effort to expand the powers of the Assembly, and thus to increase the influence of the smaller countries; this, he believed,

[67] Rowell Papers, Rowell to Borden, April 22, 1920.
[68] Borden, *Memoirs*, II, p. 1006 f.
[69] Rowell Papers, Borden to Rowell, October 20, 1920.
[70] G. M. Carter, "Some Aspects of Canadian Foreign Policy after Versailles" *(Canadian Historical Association Report*, 1943).
[71] G. M. Carter, *The British Commonwealth and International Security: The Role of the Dominions, 1919-1939* (Toronto, 1947), p. 17.

would mitigate the evils of power politics. Further, he emphasized the League's function as a preventor of war through the provision of arbitration procedures for the settlement of international disputes. Later he described the formation of the Permanent Court of International Justice as the most important achievement of the first Assembly.[72] If arbitration procedures were adequate, then, as he often pointed out, the significance of Article X was reduced; in the Assembly Rowell once more showed his indifference to the project for deleting Article X by his failure to contribute to the Canadian representations on this subject. The average newspaper reader at home learned less about Rowell's comments on the structure and purpose of the League than about his encounter with Tittoni of Italy over the distribution of raw materials, or his sermon to the Europeans on the bankruptcy of their statesmanship. The latter contributed little to the education of the Canadian public in the complexities of international relations, especially when it was accompanied by the suggestion that simply because of her remoteness from European conflicts Canada had unique qualifications for helping Europeans to solve their problems.

Few features of the Assembly pleased Rowell as much as the independence of mind displayed on several issues by the dominions vis-à-vis Great Britain, and he was glad to have the assurance of Colonel House that this development had helped to convince the Americans that the dominions were sovereign nations.[73] But disagreement between Britain and the dominions did create a constitutional difficulty: how could the British Empire delegate in the League Council then speak for all the dominions? Although Rowell had earlier strongly approved a Canadian request that the dominions be always consulted about the appointment of the Empire delegate on the Council, his experience at Geneva convinced him that this was not practicable, that the arrangement was "undoubtedly one which might create a most embarrassing and difficult situation", and should

[72] *House of Commons Debates*, April 28, 1921, p. 2722. Later Rowell told the British journalist, H. Wilson Harris: "I have always favoured the idea of compulsory jurisdiction of the Permanent Court of International Justice. That was my view at the First Assembly, in fact I think it was the view of the entire Canadian delegation, but out of deference to the views of Great Britain and other leading powers we concurred in the proposal which was finally adopted at the Assembly of having an optional clause." Rowell Papers, Rowell to Harris, March 5, 1928.

[73] Rowell Papers, Rowell to Meighen, February 9, 1921. Rowell cited two occasions of disagreement: (1) Although Canada contended that the distribution of raw materials was not properly the concern of the League, Balfour, speaking in the Council as the British Empire delegate, had approved the reference of that question to a League committee. (2) South Africa and Canada both thought that the form under which the League system of mandates was set up by the Council should have been submitted to the Assembly's committee on mandates, but Balfour took the opposite view.

be cleared up speedily.[74] The only solution, as Rowell saw it, was that the delegate to the Council should be the representative of Great Britain only and that a public statement should be issued to that effect.[75] Although Viscount Milner, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and Meighen both agreed that there was a certain anomaly in the present position neither of them saw any urgency in the matter. Meighen was satisfied that in practice the British delegate did not profess to speak for any government but that of Great Britain and in any case would not commit the dominions without previous consultation, so that clarification could await some future "general clearing up of our constitutional ideas", possibly at the next Imperial Conference.[76]

But Rowell insisted that the clearing up should be done quickly. In his last major speech in the House of Commons, and from the freedom conferred by the back benches, he urged the calling of the promised constitutional conference as soon as possible; he thought it might fittingly be held in Canada. The programme should be confined to two items: a declaration recognizing "the constitutional position of all the Dominions as equal in status with the Mother Country as self-governing nations of the British Empire" and "an outline of plans for consultation and co-operation ... in matters of common concern to the whole Empire". Although Rowell gave no indication of the precise nature of the common concerns he outlined the general principles which should inform "any recognized policy of the Empire as a whole": the Empire must hold no territorial ambitions; it should commit itself fully to the settlement of all disputes through the League of Nations and should abjure any alliances outside the League; at the same time it should work through the League and with the United States for limitation of armaments. As for Canada's position, her prime minister should insist that no important issue concerning the Empire and the United States should be settled without consultation with Canada; admittedly this was not a new policy, but the appointment of a Canadian minister in Washington would allow it to be followed more consistently. Rowell would go even further; the practice of settling British-American questions in accordance with the Canadian view in matters of purely Canadian concern must be extended, "perhaps not immediately, but certainly eventually, to cover questions in which the clear and paramount interest is Canadian. It is going much further than we have gone before ... but it is a right and sound principle". Once this principle was acknowledged Canada would be better able to act as "an interpreter and mediator between the United States and the Empire";

[74] *Ibid.*, Rowell to Meighen, March 2, 1921.
[75] *Ibid.*, Rowell to Milner, December 20, 1920.
[76] *Ibid.*, Meighen to Rowell, March 8, 1921.

in the playing of that role lay "the greatest hope for... cordial relations and the best possible understanding between the British Empire and the United States..."[77]

How would these general principles apply to the two issues which Rowell believed to be more important for Canada than any others in the spring of 1921 — German reparations and the Anglo-Japanese alliance? Rowell informed Meighen in the strongest possible terms that the current upward scaling of the Allied claims on Germany was outside the terms of the peace treaty and of the Spa agreement of 1920; he believed that British statesmen were taking part in this action against their better judgment, but feared a break with France if they opposed it. But the increased claims were to Rowell "wrong and without any adequate justification and can only lead to grave trouble in the future".[78] Canada's plan to submit a claim for $1,000,000, of which $600,000 was for pensions and separation allowances, would contribute to the breaking of an international agreement, for such costs were not included in the original reparations agreement of the armistice.[79] This policy might well lead to a new war and was just one more indication of the limitations of European statesmanship.[80]

On the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance Rowell was more outspoken than any other leading public figure in Canada before the conference of prime ministers of 1921. He was against renewal of the treaty for three reasons: the principle of no alliances outside the League precluded it; Japan no longer needed the treaty, since the war had removed any threat to her from Russia or Germany; finally, although the American criticism of the alliance was unjustified it could not be ignored, and therefore good relations between Britain and the United States would best be served if the alliance were not renewed.[81]

In discussing reparations and the Anglo-Japanese treaty Rowell stated clearly Canada's interest as a *North American* nation. In both cases, while pleading the desirability of imperial unity, he aligned Canada with the United States. Perhaps just here "the consultative empire" would break down?

It is difficult to assess precisely Rowell's relative significance in the Canadian contribution to the development of "the Borden-Smuts

[77] *House of Commons Debates*, April 27, 1921, p. 2653.

[78] Rowell Papers, Rowell to Meighen, March 11, 1921.

[79] *Ibid.*, Rowell to Loring Christie, March 11, 1921.

[80] *House of Commons Debates*, April 27, 1921, p. 2653.

[81] Rowell Papers, File 62 Ms. of address at Queen's University, April 8, 1921; *House of Commons Debates*, April 27, 1921, p. 2657.

Commonwealth". Borden himself thought it of the first importance. As the two men were retiring from the government he told Rowell:

> Since you entered the government nearly three years ago the world has passed through great events and Canada's place among the nations has become assured. Looking back over those events you may truthfully and justly say 'Quarum magna pars fui'.[82]

As a result of his ability, his interest in the subject, and his general agreement with Borden on external relations, Rowell had great influence in the cabinet and a large part in explaining government policy to the Canadian people, especially during the prime minister's long absences from Ottawa. He was more insistent than Borden on defining the forms as well as the substance of status, and the emotional overtones of Rowell the Victorian moralist were more passionate than those of Borden the Edwardian gentleman, but their intention was essentially the same. The emotional quality of his national feeling perhaps led Rowell to overestimate the extent to which other Canadians felt, or could be made to feel, his own concern about Canada's position among the nations. But for those who wanted instruction in playing 'I spy dominion status' he was the master of the game. It must not be forgotten that the explication of Canada's new status could serve a useful political purpose; at a time when the Union Government was highly unpopular on a number of scores, it was desirable for its leaders to focus attention on every achievement which might have some popular appeal. Yet Rowell's advocacy of the gospel of status was not based primarily on political necessity; he could preach it with sincerity and conviction because it grew out of his own tradition and experience.

Through the flexibilities of war-time politics Rowell was thrust onto the national political stage as the bearer of Ontario's Liberal tradition in imperial relations. That tradition combined devotion to the advancement of Canadian autonomy with strong imperial sentiments. During the war Rowell's confidence and pride in Canada were strengthened, not least by his impression that the abilities of his countrymen were not inferior to those of the soldiers and statesmen of Great Britain. A Commonwealth based on consultation among members of equal status seemed to reconcile the conflicting claims of dominion nationalism and imperial loyalty. Like other political leaders in the dominions he overestimated the ease with which the practical problems in this reconciliation could be worked out.

The new Commonwealth, as Rowell saw it, gave Canada something more than recognition. It gave her a more active role in spreading the blessings of Anglo-Saxon and Christian civilization. Moreover, as he frequently asserted, the American rejection of the League of

[82] Rowell Papers, Borden to Rowell, July 8, 1920.

Nations, which he hoped and believed would soon be reversed, had, for the time being, given Canada "the moral leadership of the North American continent". Thus, it was through Canada that the American branches of the English-speaking family would contribute their youthful purity and detachment to the solution of the world's problems. In this Rowell perhaps encouraged Canadians to adopt an exaggerated view of their country's function as interpreter between Britain and the United States and to exalt the power of moral force alone in international relations, but he was one of the few who had begun to think about the role of an autonomous Canada in a perilous world.