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M.A. Thesis Submitted to the University of Ottawa Faculty of History

**Exercising Canada's Autonomy in Foreign Relations:
The King Government and the Irish Question in World War II**



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November 24/99**



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**Exercising Canada's Autonomy in Foreign Relations:
The King Government and the Irish Question in World War II
Thesis Abstract**

During the Second World War, Ireland was the only Commonwealth state to remain neutral. It may have been expected that Canada, as the senior dominion within the Commonwealth, may have been displeased at Ireland's choice of neutrality. However, this was not the case as the government of MacKenzie King followed a moderate policy towards Irish neutrality throughout the war. This is not to say that the King government did not want Ireland to enter into the war on the side of the allies, on the contrary the opposite held true. Nevertheless, King's foreign policy towards Ireland was sympathetic largely because of King's desire to not only exercise Canada's autonomy within the Commonwealth but to respect Ireland's autonomy as well. It was evident that Irish neutrality allowed the Canadian government to follow a separate foreign policy not only within the Commonwealth but outside as well.

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Chapter I: Expanding Ties

During World War Two, the Commonwealth governments of Canada and Ireland maintained completely different positions towards the war. Whereas Canada joined the allied camp and became a major contributor to the allied cause, Ireland chose to remain neutral. Both nations also had different sentiments about the Commonwealth and Britain. Whereas Canada shared close diplomatic and cultural relations with Britain, the same could not be said for Ireland. The demonstrably loyal government of Mackenzie King could not have looked kindly upon Irish neutrality, particularly during the dismal days which followed the phony war. Indeed it would not have been surprising if the King government had chosen to chastise the Irish for their decision to remain neutral during the war. Nevertheless, this position never materialized when war broke out. In fact, quite the opposite occurred and the government of Mackenzie King would not deviate from a moderate stance vis-a-vis Irish neutrality for the duration of the war. That this occurred is due to the fact that King used the position of Irish neutrality to further exercise and define Canadian autonomy in the realm of international affairs.

Although there are numerous studies which focus upon the growth and development of Canadian foreign policy during the 1930's and 1940's, there is surprisingly little in terms of literature concerning Canadian-Irish diplomatic relations during the Second World War. By contrast, American diplomatic historians have thoroughly studied their nation's wartime relations with Ireland, whereas the same cannot be said of their Canadian counterparts. Why this is so will be left for others to speculate as it is beyond the scope of this paper.

There has, although, been one Canadian historian, Fred McEvoy, who published an article in 1977 entitled "Canadian-Irish Relations During the Second World War." McEvoy's article broke new ground in that it was the first work to deal with Canadian-Irish relations during this period and took

into account the difficulties faced by the King Government in dealing with the only neutral Commonwealth state. However, the article failed to describe why the King government chose to enhance its relations with Dublin rather than to scold a fellow Commonwealth member for not supporting the allied war effort. Surely the King government had its reasons for pursuing such a policy, McEvoy did not provide answers. In addition, McEvoy did not make use of sources from the Irish archives nor the diaries of John Kearney, the second High Commissioner appointed to Ireland, which would have augmented this study. This particular work intends to expand upon the areas that McEvoy did not address in his study of Canadian-Irish wartime relations. It is recognized, however, by the author that the present study does not fully address the domestic role played by the Irish Canadian community in influencing King's policy. That task will be for other students of this topic to deliberate upon.

The position taken by the King government towards Ireland had its roots in his previous tenure in office. The King government had slowly begun to develop an autonomous Canadian foreign policy during the 1920's. This transition was characterized by King's determination to have Canada play less of a subordinate role with respect to Great Britain as the Chanak Crisis of 1922 demonstrated. That tempest brought on a confrontation between Britain and Turkey at Chanak, a crucial strategic point on the straits separating Europe from Asia Minor. Turkish forces had been advancing towards the point and threatened the boundaries established at the end of World War One. The British, supporters of the status quo, wished to maintain these boundaries.¹

In this dispute, the British government had inadvertently angered King who learned of the crisis

¹ Denis Judd, Empire: The British Imperial Experience from 1765 to the Present (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 279.

not through London but from the media. King's anger stemmed from his conclusion that the British took the dominions for granted as reflected in London's failure to properly consult the dominions on such matters as Chanak. This belief led King to reject British appeals for Canadian support as he asserted that the Canadian Parliament, not London, would decide Canada's role in an international crisis. This sentiment continued to guide King's Commonwealth foreign policy until his defeat in the election of 1930 to R.B. Bennett.

King's convictions were further buttressed at the Imperial Conference of 1926 in which the Balfour Definition of Dominion Status was announced. It was decided at the conference that the self-governing dominions, who along with Britain made up the Commonwealth, would become autonomous communities within the British Empire and would share equal status with one another. Interestingly enough, it was the Canadian government, led by King, and the Irish delegation that were the most vociferous in their determination to have the constitutional relationship between Britain and the dominions reappraised. During this period King had undoubtedly done more than any other Prime Minister before him to broaden Canadian control of foreign policy.

Despite the progress achieved by King, the election of R.B. Bennett's Conservatives in the 1930 election brought this change to an abrupt halt. The irony in this is that in 1931, the Statute of Westminster was passed by the British government. This piece of legislation stated that the British Parliament could no longer legislate on behalf of a dominion, unless given consent; nor could any law passed by a dominion parliament be rejected by the British on the grounds that it went against English law.² In theory, the Canadian government had achieved complete control over its own

²Nicholas Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1969), 237.

foreign policy. Bennett, however, chose not to utilize this new constitutional freedom.

If anything, foreign policy under Bennett moved towards isolationism and was neglected primarily due to the economic distress created by the Great Depression. In these circumstances, the government showed little interest in expanding the nation's external horizons. Simply, the necessary finances required to operate overseas missions were not seen as a priority by Bennett in light of the depression. With regards to Commonwealth concerns, Bennett's beliefs towards Commonwealth relations were more in line with his Conservative predecessors who had traditionally supported the initiatives of the British Foreign Office. The Conservatives simply did not share in the Irish desire to carve out a separate foreign policy within the Commonwealth during this period.

Bennett's reluctance to engage in foreign commitments was exemplified when in 1930 the Irish government proposed an exchange of High Commissioners. The first proposal was followed by two further requests during 1934 from the government of Eamonn DeValera. Bennett did not immediately respond to any of the requests. The offers were eventually declined for the reason that the "immediate commercial prospects would not warrant such an appointment."³ The Prime Minister had sought the advice of the British government on what they thought of the Irish request, to which the British government expressed interest at the idea.⁴ British interest in the Irish proposal did not serve to alter Bennett's decision. Somewhat ironically, Bennett was attempting to expand Canada's trade at this time, yet he still chose to dismiss the Irish requests. This reluctance to introduce external representatives from the various nations of the Commonwealth may have

³ NAC, King Papers, Series J4, Vol 154, The Secretary of State for External Affairs Canada to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (No. 74), 28 Dec. 1934.

⁴ Ibid.

stemmed from his desire to avoid a fragmentation within the organization which might have eroded Britain's importance.⁵

Bennett's request for advice from London was not unusual. According to the historian Norman Hillmer, it was characteristic of Bennett to look for "information and leadership from Great Britain."⁶and this was where he differed from King. Bennett's Private Secretary, as noted by Hillmer, remarked that the Prime Minister's external policy was "to fulfill Canada's external commitments, first to the British Empire and then if absolutely necessary, in other directions."⁷The members of the Commonwealth, Bennett believed, must look to England for leadership. The attempts by the Irish government to secure more autonomy for itself was anathema to Bennett's vision of the Commonwealth and Empire.

Whereas external relations as a whole were largely left aside during the period of Bennett's government, the same cannot be said of the King government that replaced the Bennett government in 1935. Again there was a shift in Commonwealth foreign policy as the King government remained willing to assert Canadian autonomy within the Commonwealth. According to the historian Nicholas Mansergh, "Canadian status in the Commonwealth was not fixed; it was changing, it was developing fast" and he asserts that the reason for this was that Mackenzie King had returned to office and

⁵ Brian Douglas Tennyson, Canadian Relations with South Africa: A Diplomatic History. (Washington D.C: University Press of America, 1982), 81.

⁶ Norman Hillmer, Anglo-Canadian Relations 1926-1937: A Study of Canada's Role in the Shaping of Commonwealth Policies. (Ph.D. diss. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1974), 221.

⁷ Ibid. 221.

brought with him his enduring wariness of British Imperial intrigues.⁸ Whereas Bennett placed the Empire first, King put greater emphasis on the domestic situation and what would serve to keep the nation united. Under King, Canada's diplomatic representation abroad was to increase significantly. By 1943 fourteen new offices had been established abroad, and five of these were High Commissioners which were sent to Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Ireland and Newfoundland. In turn, those nations reciprocated by appointing High Commissioners or accredited representatives.⁹

The historian David Ross, asserts that by following such moves and holding such sentiments, King "sought to avoid commitments to the commonwealth in his attempt to increase Canadian independence from Great Britain." Indeed Ross persuasively referred to King as "the prime advocate of autonomy."¹⁰ Given these inclinations, the King government's position towards Ireland was predictable and we can better understand why the Irish government under DeValera came to see Canada as a nation that would be sympathetic to the differing views of Ireland's Commonwealth duties.

Indeed, King was his own Secretary of State for External Affairs which in itself was characterized by what the historians Jack Granatstein and Robert Bothwell referred to as "a department of

⁸ Nicholas Mansergh, "Ireland: External Relations 1926-1939" in The Years of the Great Test, ed. by Francis MacManus (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1967), 130.

⁹ W.L.M. King, "Mackenzie King on the Functional Principal, 1943," [Canada, House of Commons Debates, 9th July 1943] in Canadian Foreign Policy: Historical Readings ed. by J.L. Granatstein. (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd, 1993), 26.

¹⁰ David J. Ross, "Official Canadian Attitudes Towards the Commonwealth" Australian Journal of Politics and History 26 2 (1980), 183-184.

exceptional intellectual distinction.”¹¹ This statement was certainly true and the department contained senior members that were noticeably eager to create a foreign policy for Canada that asserted its autonomy. For instance, King had chosen O.D. Skelton as his Under-Secretary for External Affairs in 1925 to direct Canada towards a path which would allow for more latitude in areas where external affairs were concerned. That he was an exceptional figure is the judgement of not a few historians including Norman Hillmer who has written that Skelton was “one of the most important and powerful Canadians of this century.”¹² O.D. Skelton had been a professor at Queen’s University where he gained prominence as a “controversial author of an endless stream of strongly nationalist books and articles that established him as the leading Liberal intellectual of his day.”¹³ As Hillmer has shown, it was Skelton more than anyone else, who founded and moulded the modern Department of External Affairs while Under-Secretary of State from 1925 until his death in 1941.

Skelton was not sympathetic to British Imperial objectives and, like King, tended to be suspicious and balked at any attempts on the part of Britain to involve Canada in Imperial exploits. Indeed, Vincent Massey (the High Commissioner to England when war broke out) described Skelton’s attitude as embodying,

A strong and lasting suspicion of British policy and an unchanging coldness towards Great Britain. In other words, to put it bluntly, but I feel not unfairly, he was anti-British. No one who

¹¹ Robert Bothwell and Jack Granatstein, “A Self-Evident National Duty: Canadian Foreign Policy, 1935-1939,” Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 3 2 (1975), 213.

¹² Norman Hillmer, “Profile of O.D. Skelton,” International Perspectives [Canada] 1973, 46.

¹³ Hillmer, 46.

worked with him, or knew him well, could, I think, fail to recognise this.¹⁴

Moreover, both Skelton and King were wary of what they saw as the “centralizing tendencies of London.” They shared a common displeasure towards the manner in which England attempted to bind Canadians to British policies without any sort of consultation and remained steadfast in their desire to keep the nation from the mishaps of “European power politics.”¹⁵ This is not to say that they were anti-British by any stretch of the imagination. They simply distrusted the British politician who in their view tended to be “arrogant”, smug, and brimming with “insidious charm.” In addition according to Hillmer, both men during the 1930's thought that the direct threat to Canada's emerging autonomy would come from Britain and Europe.¹⁶

It is of interest to note that, as early as 1930, the British High commissioner in Ottawa noted that Skelton “and a number of Mr. Bennett's departmental advisers sympathize with Ireland.”¹⁷ This was a reference to Skelton's implicit support of a fellow Commonwealth nation attempting to distance itself from the Imperial fold. In fact, the historian John Hilliker states that it was Skelton in 1939 who suggested that a diplomatic post be considered for Ireland.¹⁸

Like Skelton, the department of external affairs counsellor Loring Christie, during the 1930's, held neutralist views and believed that the nation's interests could only be tarnished by foreign ventures.

¹⁴ Correlli Barnett, The Collapse of British Power, (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1984), 181.

¹⁵ Hillmer, “Profile of O.D. Skelton,” 49.

¹⁶ Ibid, 49.

¹⁷ Tennyson, 81.

¹⁸ John Hilliker, Canada's Department of External Affairs Volume I: The Early Years, 1909-1946, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 189.

Christie had returned to external affairs after leaving the department during King's initial term in office. The relationship between the two men had become strained but with the change in government, Christie brought his skills back to the department. Although Christie's and Skelton's views were not in line with Bennett's, it is a tribute to the talents of both men that Bennett chose to keep them in place, deeming their work to be indispensable.

Christie had grown increasingly disenchanted with the League of Nations during this period, and with the European States which controlled much influence over the other member states. It was this situation that prompted Christie to judge that Canada must assess its own direction, free of bearing from London.¹⁹ Christie's convictions centred upon the need for Canada to focus upon the "vital task" of building up Canadian well-being at home.²⁰ Both Bothwell and Granatstein argue that Christie was so reluctant to avoid foreign entanglements "as to suggest autarky as a desirable end of Canadian policy."²¹ The counsellor relayed this reluctance to one major American figure in 1937 when he expressed his anxiety that Canada would "be hooked willy-nilly" into the developing European morass.²² Lester Pearson in his memoirs provides much evidence in support of these interpretations. Reflecting upon the mind-set of the department of external affairs during the 1930's, Pearson wrote that:

While very few in Ottawa thought we could escape involvement in a major war if it came, anymore than we could in 1914, there were some, Dr. Skelton and Loring Christie among them,

¹⁹J.L. Granatstein, The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins 1935-1957, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982), 67.

²⁰ Bothwell and Granatstein. "A Self-Evident National Duty," 213.

²¹ Ibid, 213.

²² Granatstein, The Ottawa Men, 74.

who believed that such entanglement should and could be limited to minimum participation. We should avoid the bloodbaths of the Great War and the political controversies which had so dangerously divided Canada in 1917.²³

Pearson, though, characterized Skelton as “the firm foundation of our department at home and abroad. He was more. He was at the centre of all its decisions and of many of those of the government.”²⁴ He described Christie as “a man of great ability, deep sincerity, and considerable influence in the East Block.”²⁵ Christie, the man of great ability, confided with Pearson during the Summer of 1939 that he was considering resigning from being so wrought emotionally at the prospect of Canada’s position in the anticipated conflict. Christie never took this drastic step with which he wrestled. Nevertheless, it is clear that neutrality struck a chord amongst some of the foremost heads of external affairs years before World War Two began.

Both Skelton and Christie would attempt to keep Canada neutral, especially in a British conflict. As well, the views of these two senior diplomats made an impression on three up and coming members of the department, namely Pearson, J.W. Pickersgill and Hugh Keenleyside. The latter two being “close to the Skelton line.”²⁶ Pearson, as stated by Granatstein, “displayed a marked isolationism” concerning events in Europe and initially thought that Canada should avoid being caught in any European debacle.²⁷ Though for Pearson, any sense of neutrality as an option, quickly

²³ Lester B. Pearson, Memoirs Volume I: 1897-1948, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 125.

²⁴ Ibid, 192.

²⁵ Ibid, 140.

²⁶ Bothwell and Granatstein. “A Self-Evident National Duty,” 214.

²⁷ Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men*, 86.

began to evaporate as he witnessed Hitler's belligerent diplomacy towards Germany's neighbours.

Christie, by contrast, would continue to resist Canadian entanglement in a foreign war right up until the outbreak of the Second World War. On the other hand, Skelton had no illusions that war was approaching but became even more convinced, according to Bothwell and Granatstein, of the necessity of Canadian neutrality. However, one must wonder whether or not either Skelton or Christie, or even King were aware of a comment made by Charlie Burchill, who became the High Commissioner to Australia towards the end of 1939. Burchill was heard to have remarked in 1938 that "the only reason why Canada was at war when Britain was at war would be that Canada had not seen fit to exercise the autonomy which the Statute of Westminster and the Balfour Declaration conferred."²⁸ As such, Burchill's statement, which implied that Canadian foreign policy was still subordinate to that of the British government, would not have pleased King, Skelton and Christie as they were determined to avoid such a stereotype.

What is important to keep in mind though, is that there were prominent men within External Affairs who did not want to follow Britain's lead. Thus, King's own views need to be considered as distinct from those around him, such as men like Skelton and Christie, who were certainly sympathetic to the position that the Irish government would eventually choose to take. Vincent Massey, a staunch supporter of Empire, surmised that "one of the most powerful factors in his (King's) make-up" was an anti-British disposition.²⁹ Massey further surmised that King had "a morbid fear" that the nation might become unwillingly embroiled in a conflict when the government

²⁸ NAC, King Papers, Diary, 8 Jan. 1938.

²⁹ Barnett, 181.

“alone should determine”³⁰ whether or not to participate. Therefore, those who favoured the continued development of an independent Canadian foreign policy did not have to wait long for King to voice his opinion. In a House of Commons Debate on 25 January, 1937, King stated that:

Our policy is that Parliament alone can commit Canada. I cannot make this too clear. At the present time there are no commitments, so far as Canada is concerned, to participate in any war. Equally, there are no commitments of which I am aware, or of which anyone else is aware, whereby we agree to remain neutral under all circumstances.³¹

For any close student of Canadian policy there could be no illusion that King would not come to Britain’s side in the event of a war, but King was adamant that Canadian participation would not be automatic. It would be decided by the Canadian people, not the British.

Although he kept this conviction guarded, the result of such posturing on the part of King, as well as the sentiments of men like Skelton, caused British officials to question whether or not they could rely on Canadian participation in the event of a conflict. The position taken by King prompted one historian to describe him as a “North American Isolationist.”³² Even though this statement is not entirely accurate, it, nevertheless, has an element of truth. Proof of this can be seen as early as October 1936, when one British official observed that “We realise that in the present state of Canadian opinion no Canadian Government would commit itself to active participation in war.” and Bothwell and Granatstein explain that from the “British point of view, King was being extremely

³⁰ Vincent Massey, What’s Past is Prologue: The Memoirs of Vincent Massey (Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada Ltd, 1963), 240.

³¹ W.L.M. King, “On Canadian Participation in War” [House of Commons Debates, 25th January, 1937], in Documents and Speeches on British Commonwealth Affairs 1931-1952 ed. by Nicholas Mansergh (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 392.

³² Barnett, 180.

difficult.”³³

Perhaps this was so, but King was a shrewd politician who kept abreast of public opinion, particularly through newspaper editorials, and in 1936 Canadian newspapers demonstrated “an insistent and unmistakable demand that we keep ourselves aloof from wars which might arise from what is referred to as the blundering policies of any European government.”³⁴ Surely, this must have added to King’s convictions. Further disrupting British sensitivities, Skelton surmised in mid-1937 that from a military perspective, relations with England were more of a liability than beneficial. The reasoning behind this was the looming danger of a European conflict. In Skelton’s mind, Britain was far more likely to become engaged in a war on the European continent which would lead to Canadian entry into any such conflict.³⁵

The result of all of this was that by the end of 1937, the Dominions Office surmised that they could not fully rely on Canadian participation if war were to break out. This was a reversal of the expectation that apart from the undercurrent of anti-Imperial views held by “highbrows”, neutralists, French Canadians, Irish Catholics, and academics, Britain could rely on “the men of action” to come to the aid of her.³⁶ Quite simply, with the removal of the empire-friendly Bennett, the British now had to deal with a Prime Minister who was more independent and less likely to kowtow to London. According to John Hilliker, King’s view of foreign affairs were primarily based on his sensitivity for domestic affairs, particularly the concern to maintain national unity, which Hilliker asserts King

³³ Bothwell and Granatstein “A Self-Evident National Duty,” 218.

³⁴ NAC, King Papers, Series J4, Vol. 182, file c129101, 5 Sept. 1936.

³⁵ Bothwell and Granatstein, 219.

³⁶ Ibid, 218.

himself believed would be endangered by public strife over a foreign entanglement.³⁷

The British government was given a reminder of King's views towards British foreign policy at the Imperial Conference of 1937. Nicholas Mansergh described King's approach to these conferences as being "reinforced by a temperamental mistrust of imperialists."³⁸ King, believing that the Empire was divisive to Canadian unity, favoured a decentralised Commonwealth which, as argued by Mansergh, would help Canadian unity. King's approach was evident to those at the conference where he demonstrated his government's right to decide its own objectives. For instance, it was decided at the conference that the members of the British Commonwealth could now largely decide the makeup and length of their own defence policy which had not been granted before.³⁹ The Commonwealth could no longer be expected to be subordinate to one particular view and this probably provided a feeling of relief to King. Despite the hopes of the British, at the same conference, King refrained from co-operating on a wide range of issues including military and naval planning, broad strategy, or the Imperial establishment of war industries and defined sources of raw materials.⁴⁰

If King's position had the effect of antagonizing the British, then the position held by the Irish government must have sent the British delegation into conniptions. Both nations shared little love for one another, and their history made it quite unlikely that they would be able to carry on close diplomatic relations with one another. In spite of this, however, the British saw Ireland as a

³⁷ Hilliker, 176.

³⁸ Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience*, 380.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 431.

⁴⁰ Barnett, 224.

Commonwealth member. While there was not any threat of Canada leaving the Commonwealth, the same could not be said for Ireland. As early as 1932 the British became convinced that either DeValera would leave the Commonwealth or he would simply capitulate over the issues of partition, the British possession of naval ports, and financial questions.⁴¹ In particular, the issue of Ireland's ports had to be addressed, as in 1938, they were given back to the Irish. However, with the outbreak of war, the British attempts to regain use of the ports were firmly rebuked by Dublin.

A period of stalemate ensued between the two nations and by May 1936, the British began to look for some sort of an understanding with DeValera. However, by July 1936, the issue of Ireland's future within the Commonwealth came to the front and Mackenzie King made it known that he would not object to Ireland's continued involvement with Commonwealth nations if the nation chose to disassociate itself from the community.⁴² In this way, the specific question of Ireland's status in the Commonwealth allowed King to enhance Canada's position of autonomy within the Commonwealth by lending implicit support to DeValera's attempts to gradually loosen Imperial ties.

As in Canada, the question of neutrality was an issue being discussed in Ireland. While the Canadian government flirted to some degree with neutrality, it proved to be a gripping emotional issue for the Irish. Speaking in the Dail Eireann (Irish Parliament) on the 18 June, 1936, DeValera took a firm stand stating unequivocally "we want to be neutral."⁴³ At the same time DeValera

⁴¹ David Harkness, "Mr. DeValera's Dominion: Irish-Relations with Britain and the Commonwealth, 1932-1938," Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies 8 (1970), 208.

⁴² Ibid, 220.

⁴³ Eamon DeValera, Speeches and Statements by Eamon DeValera 1917-1973, ed. by Maurice Moynehan, (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1980), 416.

certainly realized the difficulties Ireland would face in preserving such a position in the event of war. Irish concerns were further exacerbated due to the status of their ports which had been, prior to 1938, under British control. This was set to change however.

Although Ireland remained a dominion within the Commonwealth, De Valera had slowly been reducing the role of the British Monarchy within Irish politics upon taking office in 1932. For example, in 1936, the King was removed from having any role within Irish internal affairs. British influence was further reduced, more importantly, by the Anglo-Irish agreement of 1938 which restored control of the Irish ports to the Irish government. While the return of the ports brought great pleasure to the Irish it would also lead to future problems. In the event of another war, it was more than likely that there would be British demands for the use of these ports by the Royal Navy. Such an occurrence would jeopardize any hope for Irish neutrality.

DeValera would reiterate his position once again on 24 March, 1938, to the Dail in a speech entitled "The Probable Implications of Irish Neutrality."⁴⁴ In this speech he stated that:

Constitutionally, I want every Deputy to realize that we have no commitments, we can keep out of war, we can be neutral if we want. There is no constitutional obligation on us, so far as I can see, not to remain neutral. I think our position in that regard differs in no ways from the position of Canada, Australia, New Zealand or South Africa. The head of Governments in these states have very, very definitely stated that they cannot be committed to war and cannot be committed in advance to take any action except whatever action may at the time be considered right and advisable by the Parliament in all the circumstances of the time.⁴⁵

This speech suggests that the position being taken by the King government was being closely followed by the Irish in Dublin, and to some degree, DeValera likely saw the King government as one that would certainly be sympathetic towards the Irish perspective.

⁴⁴ Mansergh, Documents and Speeches, 401.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 401.

The question of the Irish ports was also addressed and DeValera admitted that these ports were useful and could be a source of temptation to a belligerent power that was willing to dismiss Ireland's rights to remain neutral. Perhaps to repudiate the Imperial critics, or anyone who was paying attention in Berlin, DeValera stated that the nation should be equipped to deny such a position to that power.⁴⁶ When the issue of the ports was close to being settled in April of 1938, DeValera quoted, with pleasure, a statement made by King on the 25 January, 1937 which pertained to Canadian involvement in a future conflict. In this speech originally delivered by King, DeValera quoted King's words "It will be for this Parliament to say in any given situation whether or not Canada shall remain neutral. At any rate, that is the position which the present administration proposes to take."⁴⁷ DeValera then told the Irish Parliament that his government held the same position as the Canadian government. What is obvious from DeValera's position is that he was certainly adamant on the issue of neutrality, and it would also appear that he was keenly aware of what the other Commonwealth leaders had stated on the issue of their own nation's autonomy. As such, DeValera was certainly more than happy to use their views to advance his own position as his use of the King statement shows.

The ports were an issue that the Irish felt they could not back down upon. To them, any notion of maintaining neutrality while the British maintained bases on Irish soil was a dubious one at best. It would have been next to impossible to persuade any nation at war with Britain to respect Irish neutrality no matter how much Ireland remained non-committal. However, with the ports firmly back in Irish hands, it no longer remained a case of speeches and statements professing neutrality.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 404.

⁴⁷ DeValera, 416.

The return of the ports would allow the nation to unequivocally declare its intention to abstain from any forthcoming European war and adhere to that policy.

As the likelihood of war increased across Europe, Canada's and Ireland's announced positions began to separate. However, DeValera, maintaining his position, some would say stubbornly, again drew upon Canada's decision to exercise its autonomy stating that:

I read out here on a previous occasion a statement made in the Parliament in Canada with regard to the right of Canada to be neutral if they wanted to, the sovereign right of the Parliament there to enter into war or not as they choose. And that is our position here.⁴⁸

By contrast, the events of March (the débâcle over Czechoslovakia) characterized a deviation in relations between Mackenzie King and the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. According to historian James Eayrs, whereas Chamberlain had eschewed appeasement, King had not. Subsequently, Eayrs asserts that King's "confidence in Hitler had been shaken less than his confidence in Chamberlain."⁴⁹ Simultaneously, Skelton began to slam Britain's handling of the entire Czechoslovakia affair. In a rather scathing attack on Chamberlain's family and world-view, Skelton wrote the following:

Mr. Chamberlain's personality and convictions have become a vital factor in the situation. His speeches carry weight because they make clear his simplicity, sincerity, courage and genuine desire for peace. But he has other qualities which make it dangerous to give him a blank cheque. He is self-confident to the point of arrogance, intolerant of criticism, and at the moment sore because he thinks in the eyes of the world Hitler made a fool of him.....He is also a Chamberlain, born and bred in a Tory imperialist school, and cannot imagine that any part of the British Empire has any choice but to halt when he says halt and march when he says march.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Mansergh. Documents and Speeches, 439.

⁴⁹ James Eayrs, In Defense of Canada: Appeasement and Rearmament Volume II, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 73.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 73.

Clearly, this statement implied that the Under-Secretary remained seemingly opposed to Britain's foreign policy.

Whereas Skelton continued to voice his displeasure of British policies and of any Canadian participation in a war, King continued to distance himself from his earlier isolationist views. He noted in his diary on 28 April, 1939, that "I feel more and more that I have at this time made a mistake in letting myself be too controlled by the isolationist attitude of External Affairs."⁵¹ As much as King favoured a distinct foreign policy, he was ultimately of the view that in the event of war in Europe, Canada must participate to preserve democracy. It is fair to assume that King may have been contemplating a possible overseas conflict for sometime. The fact that under King, the Department of National Defence's expenditures rose from just over fourteen million dollars to roughly thirty four and a half million dollars between 1934 and 1939 is a point that should not be dismissed.⁵² This increase in spending was favoured by King contrary to the wishes of Skelton who favoured holding the line on defence expenditures

As Europe continued to move closer to war, the resentment towards British policy remained. When news of the Russo-German Pact reached Skelton, he in turn spoke of it as "The greatest fiasco in British history." and King chided the "blundering there has been in England's foreign policy all along the way."⁵³ Regardless, both men had different thoughts, and contrary to his views on the diplomacy chosen by the British government, King sincerely believed "that Canada would perish

⁵¹ Hilliker, 210.

⁵² Ibid, 209.

⁵³ J.L. Granatstein, Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government 1939-1945, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 5.

if it did not go to war”⁵⁴ whereas Skelton continued to espouse the opposite position. Yet, even though King realized that Canada must aid its fellow Commonwealth nations in the event of a war, he stated in a memo on 28 August, that “If we get through this, there will be an Imperial Conference at which there will have to be some very plain speaking.”⁵⁵

DeValera on the other hand did not have to deal with the conflicting emotions gripping Canada’s Secretary and Under-Secretary of external affairs. The Irish were determined to stay neutral in the event of a war which was becoming more likely each day, until finally on, 1 September, 1939, the inevitable occurred. On 2 September, DeValera addressed the Dail Eireann and read from a text that he had delivered in the Parliament the previous year (29 April, 1938)in which he repeated that Ireland would remain neutral unless attacked and that this was a view that was generally presumed by the world community. As well, the Irish people “would be prepared to strain themselves to the utmost to defend their own territory and to see that no nation suffered, because of their freedom.”⁵⁶

Even though it was firmly established that in the event of war, both Ireland and Canada would take opposite views, this did not impede the growth of diplomatic relations between the two. Evidence of this is that King invited Cosgrave, the Irish President, to visit Canada after he had finished touring the United States in February of 1939.⁵⁷ As well, King had expected and hoped for a state visit from

⁵⁴ Bothwell and Granatstein. “A Self-Evident National Duty,” 229.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 229.

⁵⁶ DeValera, 416.

⁵⁷ NAC, King Papers, Series J4, Vol. 182 . Memorandum for the Prime Minister from Skelton, 6 Feb. 1939.

DeValera in April of 1939 after the latter had finished visiting the New York Fair.⁵⁸ When it became uncertain whether or not DeValera would be able to make the visit, King sent the following memo to Massey in London:

I have heard that it is now improbable that Mr. de Valera will be able to extend his visit to Canada. Would you please ascertain definitely from Dulanty whether this is so? If so, you might inform Dulanty that on the occasion of Mr. de Valera's visit we had proposed to discuss with him the question of the exchange of High commissioners between Dublin and Ottawa.⁵⁹

The memo also made it known that if it was not possible for King and DeValera to meet, the Irish were to be informed that the King government would accept a High Commissioner from the Irish Free State.

This was not an abrupt announcement on the part of the King government as King had noted in his diary a conversation he had with the British High Commissioner, Gerald Campbell. Upon probing from Campbell on whether or not the King government was contemplating appointing a High Commissioner to Ireland, King responded that "we had very much in mind making an appointment of the kind."⁶⁰ After receiving the Irish High Commissioner, the Canadian government would reply with an appointment, to be named, later in the year. The memo to Massey being informal, Skelton sent an official note to Dublin on 15 April giving formal notice of King's desire to exchange High Commissioners.⁶¹ Thus both notes illustrate that differing decisions on entering

⁵⁸ Ibid, King Papers, Diary, 4 Mar. 1939.

⁵⁹ Ibid, King Papers, Series J4, Vol 182, The Secretary of State for External Affairs to the High Commissioner for Canada in Great Britain(No.126), 14 Apr. 1939.

⁶⁰ NAC, King Papers, Diary, 4 Mar. 1939.

⁶¹ Ibid, King Papers, Series J4, Vol 182, The Secretary of State for External Affairs to the Minister for External Affairs Dublin, 15 Apr. 1939.

into a European conflict did not impede developing relations between the two nations. Actually, the opposite had occurred as both nations shared common ground in their attempts to exercise their autonomy.

With the invitation put forth, prior to the outbreak of war, the Irish appointed John J. Hearne as High Commissioner to Canada in August of 1939.⁶² Hearne had been a legal adviser in Irish External Affairs and was happily accepted by the Canadian government. In turn, King announced Canada's commitment to open up a diplomatic presence in Dublin in the near future. It had been a busy year in terms of growth for the department of external affairs, the Belgians had established a legation in Ottawa and Skelton proposed that the first new mission in Europe should be in Belgium, followed by other posts that should be set up in South Africa, Argentina, Australia and Ireland.⁶³

The commitment to open an embassy prompted one scholar to remark that "Interest in the presence of a Canadian representative in Dublin took its origin chiefly because of neutrality."⁶⁴ But neutrality alone would not have provided King with a sufficient reason to press for a Canadian High Commissioner to Dublin, surely there was more to it. The strategy of course, was King's willingness to use Irish neutrality to assert Canadian foreign policy within the Commonwealth. Indeed, it would appear that the establishment of an embassy in Dublin was the next step in King's desire to expand his government's relations with Ireland and to exercise Canadian autonomy. In all likelihood, the expansion of relations between the two was characteristic of King's desire to further develop

⁶² Fred McEvoy, "Canadian-Irish Relations During the Second World War," Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 5 2 (1977), 207.

⁶³ Hilliker, 189.

⁶⁴ Robert MacGregor Dawson, Canada in World Affairs 1939-1941: Two Years of War (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1943), 278.

Canadian foreign policy. Nevertheless, Canadian representation abroad grew from five to seven posts with a commitment to open one in Dublin.

It would appear that on the eve of the war, diplomatic relations between Canada and Ireland were progressing rather than regressing, contrary to their outlook on their commitments to the Commonwealth. This could be seen somewhat as a surprise as Canadians mistakenly tend to look on their past history as being staunchly pro-British and governed by predominantly pro-Imperial governments, although this was not the case after 1921. Why then, with war about to break out on the European continent did Canada not hold any hostility or sense of betrayal towards the position taken by Dublin?. The evidence would suggest that King truly sympathized with DeValera's attempts to follow a path that he felt was right for the people of Ireland. As well, King and many of his closest advisors could not hold much of a grudge as many of them had indeed thought of the possibility of a neutral Canada. As such, it would have been hypocritical on the part of the King government to critique DeValera's position. Perhaps King was simply using this situation to continue to carve out a foreign policy which would differentiate Canada from Britain. A closer examination though will show that just as Ireland was exercising its right to remain neutral, King was asserting Canada's right to determine its own foreign policy. It is quite clear that with the outbreak of war, Canadian - Irish diplomatic relations were moving closer together rather than further apart.

Chapter II: Pursuing an Independent Line in External Policy

With great determination, King had announced, well before September of 1939, that Canadian domestic interests would determine foreign policy. Nevertheless, in the event of a war in which Britain was threatened Canada would quickly enter into the fray. What King had wanted to establish was the principle that Canada alone had the power to decide what course of action it would ultimately take concerning foreign policy. Canada was not alone, though, in asserting this principle. The Irish government had also announced well before September of 1939 that it would determine its own foreign policy. The Irish position went further than the Canadian one. Indeed, the King government was fully aware that in the event of a war in Europe, Dublin would remain neutral. With the outbreak of war in September, 1939, Ottawa entered into the hostilities whereas Dublin remained neutral. Still, the King government did not appear to be perturbed by Dublin's stance and allowed for the continued establishment of diplomatic relations between the two nations. The period between September, 1939 and the Fall of France in June, 1940, offers the historian an interesting view of both similarities and dissimilarities in attitudes towards war and the preservation of sovereignty. Ultimately the period began with the strengthening of formal ties, followed by the steady development of these ties even though with the Fall of France, the course set in August of 1939 by the King government was confirmed. Although there was a fundamental dichotomy between the role of both nations in the war, the development in relations was aided due to the fact that both nations wished to assert their own autonomy and preserve national unity.

Earlier, as it became clear that war in Europe was inevitable, the King Liberals had begun their preparations, though not without some difference of opinion. Skelton, as head of the Department of External Affairs and King's senior foreign policy advisor, had become increasingly disillusioned

with the prospect of Canada entering into what he viewed as a European problem. King, while far from enthusiastic, realized that given Canada's position as the senior dominion it must be at Britain's side. Initially, King sought a role of limited participation so as to prevent the horrible losses sustained in World War One. More to the point, King desperately wanted to avoid another conscription crisis such as the one that threatened national unity in World War One. The King government would offer its full political support to the allies, all the while remaining adamant that the Canadian Parliament would decide Canadian entry into the war. To that end Canada's parliament voted on 10 September, 1939, to formally enter into the conflict. By contrast, Britain had decided to go to war a week earlier when the Germans had snubbed Britain's requests to end their rapid drive into Poland.

By waiting one week the King government felt that it had sufficiently asserted its own diplomatic autonomy and prepared for war. Ireland, however, did not make the same choice. On the eve of Britain's declaration of war, the Irish Dail approved of formal neutrality without domestic controversy. As observed by Nicholas Mansergh, this declaration of neutrality came as no surprise because De Valera had visibly been laying the foundation for neutrality. This was accomplished through formulating a clear policy for independent nations to observe and supported with the delivery of succinct speeches on the issue of neutrality.¹ Indeed whereas the Canadian government had struggled in trying to figure out how best to assert its autonomy, Dublin had the problem all worked out to its satisfaction. In fact, Dublin was far from alone in opting for neutrality. As observed by Irish Historian J.J. Lee: "if declarations of neutrality were the definition of

¹ Nicholas Mansergh, The Unresolved Question: The Anglo-Irish Settlement and its Undoing 1912-1972, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 310.

statesmanship, the world never had so many statesman as in September 1939.”² Lee, of course, was referring to such neutral nations as Belgium, Holland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States. Although the Irish were not alone in their choice, the British were far from pleased, perhaps understandably so, that they were deprived of Irish ports and overt political support.

As the senior member of the Commonwealth, Canada chose to navigate through a tense period in Anglo-Irish affairs using all the ingenuity its statesmen could muster. Admittedly, Anglo-Irish relations during this period were far from amiable. The two neighbours had shared a long troubled history and the first two decades of the twentieth century were perhaps the most volatile in modern history between the two states. Events such as the 1916 Easter Uprising, the fight for independence and the partitioning of Northern Ireland remained vivid in the minds of many in Ireland and the bitterness was directed not only to the mother country but also to all who seemed to support her. Such feelings were not easily erased and Commonwealth relations had further soured due to Ireland’s refusal to allow the Royal Navy to use Irish ports in the event of a war as it would compromise Irish neutrality. This, however, was an issue in which DeValera had clearly stated his governments position and if the King government was irked by Dublin’s stance it was not stated. The fact that Ireland was the only neutral member of the Commonwealth during the war was an issue that could have offered King an opportunity to choke off relations between Dublin and Ottawa. King, however, did not allow this to occur and Canada, although the senior dominion at Britain’s side, followed a policy of strengthening Canada’s relations with Dublin as war broke out in September, 1939. Indeed the arrival of the Irish High Commissioner, John Hearne, in August of

² J.J. Lee, Ireland 1912-1985 Politics and Society, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 242.

1939 was the first step in what would mark a curious strengthening of ties between the Ottawa and Dublin.

While Hearne was establishing his presence in Ottawa he received news from Skelton that the King government was in the process of submitting the estimates to Parliament to provide for the appointment of a High Commissioner to Ireland. According to Skelton, this move would "help, as your own appointment has helped, to facilitate the intercourse and increase the understanding and co-operation between our two countries."³ This message was sent on September 8, six days after Dublin's announcement of formal neutrality thus indicating that Ottawa was not alienated by Dublin's own foreign policy which surely impacted upon the other members of the Commonwealth. In the meantime, Mackenzie King received a brief detailing the background of Hearne and it would appear that Dublin placed much importance on its relations with Ottawa by choosing Hearne.

John Joseph Hearne was an accomplished man. A lawyer by trade, he had become the Legal Advisor to Ireland's Department of External Affairs between 1929-1939. Adding to this, Hearne had delivered lectures at the Geneva Institute of International Relations and at Oxford. He had also attended numerous international conferences and thus had experience on the international scene.⁴

Upon meeting Hearne, King noted in his diary that Hearne was "a very pleasant young fellow, most attractive in many ways, typically Irish in his persuasive ways." King was also "struck by his youth but like his keen mind and enthusiasm- an exceptionally pleasant nature."⁵ Hearne also

³ David Murray, ed., Documents on Canadian External Relations, Volume 7, Part I (Ottawa, 1974), 7.

⁴ NAC, King Papers, Series J4, Vol. 182, Memorandum for the Prime Minister from O.D. Skelton, 20 Sept. 1939.

⁵ Ibid, King Papers, Diary. 20 Sept., 1939.

disclosed that amongst the Canadians he had met with upon arrival, none had criticised Dublin's attitudes and that those he had spoken with "all seemed to feel we had been exceptionally well prepared, and had done the right thing."⁶ The Irish High Commissioner, in King's words, "spoke very nicely of the impressions he got of our attitude from following the debate in the H. of C."⁷ It was apparent from the discussion that Hearne was quite pleased with Canada's foreign policy and his remarks about Canadian attitudes probably flattered King who always worried about public opinion.

Although Ireland now had a High Commissioner in place. King's records, as well as those of the Department of External Affairs, indicate that from October to December, 1939, there was a brief interlude in which there was not much diplomatic traffic between the two countries. This can largely be attributed to the fact that Ottawa still had not established a post in Dublin and the King government was in the process of choosing a suitable representative. Moreover, the Irish government had its hands full in dealing with its own relations with Britain.

With the Anglo-Irish relationship much in mind, Canada's High Commissioner to Britain, Vincent Massey, cabled King to inform him that the British Admiralty was "greatly handicapped" in coping with German submarine attacks by not "being able to use any port in Eire for refuelling and repair of destroyers employed on convoy duty."⁸ Massey let it be known that approaches were being made by the British government to Dublin concerning naval cooperation but it was expected that any such

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ NAC, RG 25, File 398, Vol. 781, The High Commissioner for Canada in Great Britain to the Secretary Of State For External Affairs (No. 526), 19 Oct. 1939.

attempt would not be successful.⁹ On October 24, five days after the initial telegram, Massey informed King that London's approaches had indeed failed in that DeValera would not permit any concessions on the ports and reiterated that any such move could jeopardize the state of neutrality.¹⁰ If King had become alienated by DeValera's stance, he did not so announce nor did he record his displeasure in his diaries for this period. Most notably, he did not attempt to reverse his government's choice to appoint a High Commissioner to Ireland.

The same day that King received confirmation from Massey that the Irish government would not allow Britain the use of the ports, King made a nationwide broadcast which did not critique the Irish government for its stand but instead stayed on the safe topic of the sins of Nazism and Canada's own stance thereon, strongly denouncing the Nazi government:

I have been compelled to believe that only by the destruction of Naziism, and the resistance of ruthless aggression can the nations of the British Commonwealth hope to continue to enjoy the liberties which are theirs under the British Crown, and the world itself be spared a descent into a new and terrible age of barbarism.¹¹

Canada still considered Ireland to be a member of the British Commonwealth. So King made a subtle reference in which all members of the Commonwealth had a vital role to play in his view if the Germans were to be defeated. As well, he continued in his speech to make reference to the threat of Naziism towards Christian civilization and referred to the present war as a crusade.¹² While this speech was not directed towards Dublin, surely the thrust could not have been missed by both

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, The High Commissioner for Canada in Great Britain to the Secretary of State for External Affairs (No. 557), 24 Oct. 1939.

¹¹ W.L.M. King, Canada at Britain's Side, (Toronto: MacMillan Publishers, 1941), 39.

¹² Ibid, 40.

Hearne and Dublin. In particular, King's use of the threat towards Christianity was shrewd for many Irish citizens were aghast at how Catholic Poland had been spilt up between Germany and the atheistic Soviet Union.

Gerald Campbell, the British High Commissioner in Ottawa, sent a telegram to King a week after Massey's initial telegram. The Campbell telegram provides another example of the means by which relations between Ottawa and Dublin remained on course. Campbell wrote of the importance of the Irish ports to Britain, particularly noting that German submarines "have recently been operating further out into the Atlantic beyond the zone to which at present destroyer escorts and aircraft patrols have been operating." The use of Irish bases on the west coast would counteract this problem.¹³ The telegram described a recent conversation between De Valera and Britain's High Commissioner in Dublin, the conversation being somewhat remarkable in that De Valera stated that Ireland would remain neutral but asserted that his "own sympathies were with the allies" and that he would do anything short of breaching neutrality to aid the allies.¹⁴

Campbell let it be known to King that the British were examining De Valera's reply. Whether or not Campbell was hoping to use this information to persuade King to apply pressure on Ireland is not certain. Yet, given the nature of Canada's role as the senior dominion and the fact that Ottawa was in the midst of expanding relations with Dublin, there may well have been hope, on the part of the British, that King would act as a lynch-pin between Dublin and London in resolving disputes.

Like Ireland though, Canada too had its points of friction with Britain during the autumn of 1939

¹³ NAC, RG 25, File 398, Vol. 781, High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in Canada to King, (No. 517/34), 26 Oct. 1939.

¹⁴ Ibid.

and it must be noted that whereas Ireland was asserting its autonomy by not taking part in the war, Canada sought to ensure that its own interests were not pushed to the wayside by the British. For example, between 26 September until 17 December, 1939, the Canadian government pursued, somewhat exasperatingly, negotiations with Britain concerning the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP). This plan would eventually become one of the most significant Canadian military contribution to the war and was designed to train “tens of thousands of air crews from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Britain and her colonies” in Canada.¹⁵ The BCATP was an example of King’s policy of limited participation as it was meant to make an effective contribution to the allied air campaign, but it would also let the Canadian government avoid casualties. As will be recalled, King’s government “was autonomist by disposition” and from his first term as Prime Minister in 1921 “King had pursued an independent line in external policy.”¹⁶ Although war had broken out, King still remained quite wary of British governments dictating their interests to Canada, and as such he developed the impression that London was indeed instructing Canada as to the terms of the BCATP. This was anathema to the staunch autonomist and King mused in his diary that it was “amazing how these people...from the Old Country... seem to think that all they have to do is tell us what is to be done. No wonder they get the backs of people up on this side.”¹⁷ In King’s view, the British government was attempting to “Keep Canadian squadrons at its own disposal, merged into the British forces, creating all the trouble in the air field that was created on land with

¹⁵ J.L. Granatstein, Canada’s War: The Politics of the MacKenzie King Government, 1939-1945, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990), 43.

¹⁶ C.P. Stacey, Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada 1939-1945, (Ottawa: The Queen’s Printer for Canada, 1970), 138.

¹⁷ NAC, King Papers, Diary, 17 Oct. 1939.

the army in the last war.”¹⁸ Clearly the war had not altered King’s fears of imperial centralization.

Eventually the details of the training programme were worked out much to the satisfaction of the Canadians. They had won numerous concessions from the British, most notably “Control of the administration of the plan; the assurance that Canadian pupils would be placed into RCAF squadrons.” The British would also declare that the plan would take priority over all other forms of contributions that Canada would make to the allied war effort. Lastly, but equally as important, the Canadians had reduced the amount of the cost that they would be expected to absorb.¹⁹ The negotiations, as noted by Jack Granatstein, illustrated that King was “difficult to deal with when he was fighting to protect what he and his colleagues perceived as the Canadian national interest.”²⁰ This was, in Granatstein’s view a “commendable objective even in wartime” as the British were clearly doing the same in attempting to divert as much of the costs over to their Commonwealth allies.²¹ Moreover, King had another objective in making the BCATP as favourable as possible to Canada. Like De Valera, King was adamant about maintaining national unity. The success of the BCATP would hopefully enable Canada to avoid heavy infantry losses and the need for conscription, which threatened to cripple national unity. Thus, in a different manner King was doing what De Valera was doing, namely, protecting the interests of the nation and protecting national unity.

The BCATP issue illustrates both King’s desire and instinct to safeguard national autonomy, just

¹⁸ Ibid, 9-10 Dec. 1939.

¹⁹ Granatstein, *Canada’s War*, 57.

²⁰ Ibid, 58.

²¹ Ibid.

as De Valera had done by opting for neutrality. This was an example of the common ground that the two nations shared and if there was any friction or pressure between Dublin and Ottawa leading into the new year, it was not evident. Ottawa's plans to establish a High Commissioner went ahead without any major public outcry and relations between the two were openly progressing. Adding to this was the fact that Hearne continued to impress King. Upon listening to a radio address from Hearne, King noted in his diary that the broadcast "was typically Irish, warm hearted towards friends, bitter towards England."²² However, King also observed that the address made clear that Irish "sympathies were against Hitler but without united Ireland, not strong enough to lead to active support of British forces in the war."²³ In addition to this, Hearne contacted King on Christmas day to inform him of De Valera's "best wishes for Christmas Day and for the New Year."²⁴ King was apparently touched by the message and took the time to record De Valera's tidings for a "happy, prosperous and triumphant year" in his diary.²⁵

Following this there were two events that took place on 28 December which illustrated that relations continued to progress. The first, and most important, was a government Order in council that appointed John Hall Kelly, Esquire to be the High Commissioner for Canada in Ireland "as of and from February first, 1940."²⁶ Secondly, in a letter, Hearne notified Joseph Walshe (the Irish Secretary for External Affairs) that he had spoken with King on Christmas Day. During their

²² NAC, King Papers, Diary, 21 Dec. 1939.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, 25 Dec. 1939.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Murray, op. cit., 8.

conversation King has asked Hearne to pass on his “personal good wishes” to De Valera. King further remarked that the interests of Ireland were “very near and dear” to him more particularly since Hearne’s appointment as Irish representative in Canada.”²⁷

In seeking to further relations, King had chosen a High Commissioner with ties to the Liberal party. Sixty years old at the time of the announcement, Kelly was both a lawyer and a Quebec Liberal who had served, albeit briefly, in the Quebec Provincial government as minister without portfolio from 1935-36.²⁸ The following day, King contacted E.J. Garland to inform him that he would be accompanying Kelly as Secretary to the Office of the High Commissioner for Canada in Ireland. Garland himself was born in Ireland and had immigrated to Canada where he worked as a lawyer in Calgary. Skelton let it be known to Garland that upon arrival in Ottawa, Hearne would be “very glad to see you” and would be available to dispense any information that would be of use to Garland.²⁹

The reaction from Dublin was cheerful and, given the less than amiable relations with Britain, there was little wonder that Dublin would have been eager to expand relations abroad. The fact that it was doing this with a British ally such as Canada must have brought a sense of relief to many Irish officials. By maintaining and expanding relations with the Commonwealth’s senior dominion, Dublin had not only improved relations with Britain’s most important war ally but also avoided isolation within the Commonwealth. As such, Hearne reciprocated to Skelton that the Irish

²⁷ Irish National Archives, DFA, File 219/49 Hearne to Walshe, 28 Dec. 1939.

²⁸ Fred McEvoy, “Canadian-Irish Relations during the Second world War,” The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 5 2(1977), 207.

²⁹ NAC, King Papers, Series J2, Vol. 155, File IRELAND CAN, HIGH COMM., TO Vol. 4, Skelton to Garland, 29 Dec. 1939.

government was “deeply grateful” for the appointment of Kelly.³⁰

King sent De Valera a personally drafted telegram on 30 December. In it King expressed his hope that Kelly’s appointment would serve to “increase the understanding and goodwill” between the two nation and wished De Valera the Irish people “best wishes for the New Year.”³¹ King’s message of goodwill received a prompt reply the following day from De Valera who reciprocated his thanks and the New Year tidings. Clearly, despite their political differences both King and De Valera had ended 1939 on a successful note with the strengthening of ties between the two nations. With Kelly to begin his posting in February, it looked as if this pattern would continue.

Evidence of these closer ties between Dublin and Ottawa came in January, 1940, when the British Ministry of Economic Warfare suggested that the list of prohibited metals and minerals for export be expanded. This move further built upon the actions taken by the King government which had previously introduced, in September 20, 1939, the licensing of exports so as to prevent raw materials falling into the hands of the Germans. Nine days later an order-in council was put forth which prohibited the export of certain metals, minerals and commodities such as nickel, aluminum and wheat “except under permit from the Minister of National Revenue.”³² As noted by James Eayrs, an embargo was placed on all export products destined for neutral nations that bordered lands occupied or controlled by the Germans. However, on 29 February this embargo was extended to include “all

³⁰ Ibid, King Papers, Series J4, Vol. 182, High Commission of Ireland to Department of External Affairs, 29 Dec. 1939.

³¹ Murray, *op. cit.*, 9.

³² James Eayrs, In Defence of Canada: Appeasement and Rearmament Volume II, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 163-165.

European neutrals except Eire, Portugal and Turkey.”³³ There is no record within the department of external affairs or in the MacKenzie King papers of any Canadian opposition to this move.

Apart from this flurry of activity from December 1939 to February 1940, correspondence between Ottawa and Dublin was minimal until the invasion of France in May. This is perhaps best explained in that Kelly and Garland were establishing themselves in Dublin, there really was not much to report about. After all, the phony war continued unabated and despite the fact that the British did not have the use of Ireland’s ports, the Battle of the Atlantic had not yet risen to a fever pitch and Irish neutrality had not created any immense threat or controversy. However, this settling in period came to an end in April as the German armies rapidly advanced throughout Denmark and Norway. The German high command then successfully launched quick strikes into the Benelux countries followed by a spectacular thrust into France which led the French to seek an armistice on 17 June, 1940. The resulting calamity left the Commonwealth allies reeling and made the issue of Irish neutrality all the more controversial.

The reason that the German successes placed an added emphasis on the importance of Ireland was twofold. To begin, Britain’s major ally on the continent had been defeated along with her neighbours, and to her west stood neutral Ireland. Ireland after all had been an island used on numerous occasions in the past by Britain’s enemies to launch equally numerous failed invasion attempts. Moreover, the German navy and air force now had numerous bases in which they could deploy their force, an advantage that they had never had during the First World War. Thus from a British point of view, the Irish ports had become increasingly vital. Nonetheless, despite this drastic turn of events for the allies, Canadian-Irish relations remained firm.

³³ Ibid. 163.

The King diaries do not contain any indications that King had become vehemently opposed to Ireland's neutrality despite the catastrophe that had occurred to the allies. Given the increased importance and strain placed on Canada and the Commonwealth war effort, it would not have been surprising that King would have sought some concessions from De Valera, if not to Britain, then maybe to Canada. Although the British were placing increasing pressure on De Valera to strengthen military ties, due to the increasing German threat, King did not become personally involved. On 15 June 1940, Vincent Massey, the High Commissioner in London, warned King that:

Problem of Ireland in the light of the present crisis is giving authorities here great concern should German forces succeed in landing on Irish soil and gaining a foothold there they could easily establish air bases from which they could gravely threaten western ports of Great Britain.³⁴

Massey described De Valera as being "morbidly sensitive" to the neutrality issue and incapable of hearing of any precautionary measures that would establish British troops on Irish soil to prevent an invasion. This should not have surprised Massey or anyone else for that matter as De Valera had consistently enunciated that Ireland would not enter into the war or engage in activities that could lead to German reprisals.

Massey's telegram combined with the disastrous turn of events led King to record acidly in his diary that the British would not admit to "anything which does not leave them supreme in their own eyes."³⁵ The allied reversals had not undermined King's wariness of the British. Adding to this, King wrote in his diary that "Again English Tories are paying for their sins in not having met the Irish

³⁴ Murray, op. cit., 451.

³⁵ NAC, King Papers, Diary, 16 June. 1940.

situation long ago.”³⁶ Perhaps with the intention of acting as a lynch-pin, King wrote to De Valera the same day and warned that surely the Nazi’s would soon look to Ireland “because of its tempting value as a prize in itself and as a base for immediate operations against Great Britain.”³⁷ In addition, he cautioned that such an event would not only jeopardize all Irishmen but that “The people of Canada who owe so great a debt to the men and women of Ireland, south and north alike who have shared in the building of our country, would feel that fate their own.”³⁸ As such, King expressed his desire to see De Valera and his Northern Irish counterparts cooperate in establishing a coordinated and effective resistance if any invasion was to occur. It is highly unlikely that King was exaggerating this threat. As we know now, the Germans had formulated invasion plans for Ireland. Even at the time though, without a thorough knowledge of exact German plans, the British government hinted darkly to King that it was suspected that the German Air Force had “acquired large-scale maps of Ireland.”³⁹ Given the panic amongst the allies at the time, King could not be faulted for warning the Irish of the German threat and for even gently nudging them away from neutrality.

The strategic issues that now raised their head have long been and continue to be debated. Correlli Barnett in his work “The Collapse of British Power” asserted that Ireland had been, since medieval

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, RG 25, Vol 781, File 398, The Secretary of State for External Affairs Canada to the Minister of External Affairs, Ireland, 16 June, 1940

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid, Telegram from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Secretary of State for External Affairs Canada, 22 June, 1940.

times. of significant “strategic importance.”⁴⁰ This was largely due to the fact that British enemies could attack from the west and expose “English sea communications.”⁴¹ In Barnett’s view, Ireland acted as the rear-entrance way into England that had attracted numerous powers in the past.

On the other hand, Nicholas Mansergh argued that an invasion of Ireland would not have been feasible from a logistics sense so long as the British navy remained intact since with the Royal navy intact “any notion of a German transfer of troops, or even maintaining a supply line was sheer nonsense.”⁴² Moreover, Mansergh asserted that the topography of Ireland would have left any German force, provided it could be landed, entirely vulnerable from air attacks whereby they could be destroyed “piecemeal by British forces enjoying the full protection of the British naval supremacy.”⁴³ Where air support was concerned, Mansergh noted that the weather would have obviously played an important role with the seasonal “heavy rainfall, low clouds and very frequent damp and foggy weather” presenting a serious problem to any attacking air force.⁴⁴ Lastly, the Germans would also have to contend with allied fighters which would more than likely lead to substantial German air losses.

The intelligence debate also has to be considered as many British officials fretted that a neutral Ireland would provide safe haven for possible German espionage and counter-intelligence activities.

⁴⁰ Correlli Barnett, The Collapse of British Power, (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1984), 184.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Nicholas Mansergh, Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of Wartime Cooperation and Postwar Change 1939-1952, (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 68.

⁴³ Ibid, 71.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

It is noteworthy that in his official works on British intelligence during the war, the historian Harry Hinsley, noted the extensive measures taken by the Irish government to decapitate the I.R.A. and thereby impede German attempts to penetrate Ireland. For example, towards the end of 1939, Dublin imposed the Emergency Powers Act which gave the government the authority to crack down on the I.R.A. This legislation was acted upon forcefully and in one instance, Irish authorities seized a transmitter that was used to communicate with the Germans.⁴⁵ The Emergency Powers Act was strengthened in June of 1940, as the German juggernaut stormed through France. The revised act now permitted Irish citizens to be interned without trial and established a military court for the trial of particular offences. In addition to these measures, Dublin sought closer ties with the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The result of such actions, as noted by Hinsley, was that the "I.R.A. was demoralised by the increasing number of police raids, arrests and internments."⁴⁶

Although the Germans were persistent in their attempts to insert new agents into Ireland until the middle of 1944, their attempts were largely fruitless. More often than not German agents were either captured by the authorities or were exposed by their own botched efforts. As Hinsley has noted, the Germans did not attempt to change their methods or use any innovation and as a result "there was no improvement in the results obtained."⁴⁷ This would demonstrate that Ireland's neutrality did not have overly dire consequences for the allies. Although this is known today, it was less clear at the time and undoubtedly there were valid reasons to worry that Ireland could act as a conduit for

⁴⁵ F.H. Hinsley and C.A.G. Simkins, British Intelligence in the Second World War: Volume IV Security and Counter-Intelligence, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1990), 42.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 90.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 193.

German intelligence. The pitch of Irish animosity towards Britain had not cooled much despite the new facts of war. If King deliberated on these matters, as he probably did, the record has not been found. It may well be that such ruminations were harshly worded and thought imprudent in the light of later days.

There is, however, evidence that the King government may have acted as a back channel for the Irish government to supply intelligence to the British. The King papers contain an interesting compilation that is dated September 1939. This list, that King would have likely seen, was kept in his personal records. It listed known Germans in Ireland at the beginning of the war. The location of these people, their occupation and whether or not they were suspected Nazi's or involved in any clandestine activities were noted. Also this list included their date of entry into Ireland and commented upon whether or not they had an Irish passport.⁴⁸

As the list was of doubtful utility to Canada why is it in the King papers?. The most plausible, indeed probable explanation is that the Irish government may have approached the King government to relay these lists to the British. If the Irish public had found out that De Valera's government had given these records directly to the British the public reaction would have been damaging. By possibly sending them through Canada, a nation held in higher regard, De Valera would have lessened this backlash and made it difficult for the German authorities to intercept such information which would have jeopardized Ireland's neutrality. Most importantly, this incident could shed light on why King may not have been as outspoken as were Conservative politicians on Ireland's neutrality.

Apart from his message to De Valera, it must be noted that there are no other records within the

⁴⁸ NAC, King Papers, Series J4, Vol. 182, c129201-129216, Sept. 1939

King papers that indicate that he did anything more than dispatch this note. As well, there are no records from Kelly which indicate that the Canadian government was contemplating calling for Irish entry into the war. Not only was King rather distant on the matter of Ireland's political stance, but the Hansard records for this period are entirely devoid on the question of Irish neutrality, thereby indicating that Canadian public opinion was not aroused by this event. It is apparent that King had chosen not to deviate whatsoever from his policy that it was up to the Irish government to decide its position.

The Irish, though, were also well aware of King's own national unity and autonomist sentiments and were not reluctant to remind Canadian officials that both nations shared a desire to maintain national unity and autonomy. Shortly after the Fall of France, Hearne met with Skelton and reminded him of "King's keynote election speech this year which had been in the main a plea for Canadian national unity." In addition to this, Hearne also spoke of:

Mr. King's attitude in 1938 to the proposal of the British government to establish an air arm in Canada under British control. I said that it seemed to me that there was a close similarity between the principles underlying Mr. King's policy in these matters and those underlying our own national policy at the present time.⁴⁹

Hearne described Skelton as appearing "pleased at my references to the Prime Minister's nationalism" in which Skelton smilingly responded "Nationally, we could agree with you."⁵⁰ It was apparent that both nations shared a common objective: the maintenance of national unity.

King did not have any military inclinations at the time nor during his political career did he ever exhibit any passion towards military affairs. It is unlikely, therefore, that military arguments or

⁴⁹ Irish National Archives, DFA, File 219/49, Hearne to Walshe, 9 July, 1940.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

strategy that cited the importance of Ireland determined his diplomatic course. Ultimately, the two arguments that would have swayed King would have been the issue of Commonwealth autonomy and the maintenance of national unity. Concern for the maintenance of a good trading relationship could not have been far from his purpose either. King was surely alarmed with the Fall of France and the speed in which the German army had conquered Western Europe, yet his Irish policy remained the same as it had been prior to the disastrous spring of 1940. Ireland had followed the same line as well, namely that it welcomed expanding relations abroad but that it alone would decide for itself what decisions would be made. This was a conviction that King could not easily dismiss as he had fought for it, albeit slowly at times, within the Commonwealth beginning with Chanak and as late as the BCATP. Surely he would have been contradicting himself, if not reversing a noteworthy precedent, had he openly denounced Ireland's choice of neutrality. Instead King chose to strengthen ties during this period and despite the catastrophic situation that the allies faced in the spring of 1940, King had confirmed that he would not deviate from maintaining ties with Dublin.

Chapter III: The Ports Debate

Whereas the beginning of 1940 was characterized by a brief lull in relations between Dublin and Ottawa, this was no longer the case after the fall of France. Not only did Ireland's geopolitical proximity to Britain raise increased concern about any neutrality that might prove pro-German, but the Battle of the Atlantic increased in intensity bringing devastating losses to allied shipping. This had the effect of focussing attention on Irish neutrality. Britain's survival depended entirely on the maintenance of its lifelines across the Atlantic. It was this latter issue that thrust the King government into a controversial and expanding debate centred upon Ireland's neutrality. As autumn 1940, approached, the issue of the Irish ports became a cause for debate not only amongst the Commonwealth allies, but also within Canadian politics. The Canadian Conservative party staunchly supported Winston Churchill's calls for the ports to be handed over to the allies. This was not a surprise as the Conservatives historically had firm imperial convictions which tended to dominate their world view. Indeed, the ports issue marked a clear divide, vis-a-vis foreign policy, between the King Liberals and the Meighen Conservatives. It also marked a period in which the opposition and elements within Canadian society attempted to persuade the Liberal government to adopt a hard-line towards Ireland. King and Skelton would have undoubtedly been pleased to see the Irish ports turned over to the allies, yet unlike the Conservatives, they bristled at any calls to forcibly seize the ports. The ports debate within Canada was marked by King's consistent refusal to intervene in Irish affairs and his dismissal of Conservative attacks. Even when both Skelton and Kelly, two of his most influential advisors passed away, King did not change his course. It can be readily shown that the Irish ports issue marked a momentous issue in which King continued to craft a Canadian foreign policy which exercised Canadian autonomy and was based on national unity.

Upon his arrival as High Commissioner in Dublin, Kelly kept the department of external affairs

abreast of political views within Dublin. An increase in traffic between the High Commissioner and Ottawa began in August of 1940. This increase stemmed from the allied reversals in Europe and concern in Ottawa whether these reversals had altered Irish political opinion towards the neutrality issue. On 14 August, 1940, news was received in Ottawa that De Valera had reaffirmed, in an interview to an American journalist, that Ireland would remain neutral.¹ Hence, Ireland would continue to maintain control over its own ports and airfields. By declaring this, De Valera was rebuffing increased calls from Britain and the neutral United States for the ports to be handed over to the allies as the Battle of the Atlantic intensified.

Though The Battle of the Atlantic has its own extensive literature, it may be useful here to summarize some key points as they impinged on the question of the Irish ports. Germany had never lost the vision of defeating Britain at sea by destroying the imports on which she depended, something which would have been theoretically possible with the construction of a large surface ship but which really was only feasible by employment of submarines. Submarines, however, had limitations and the control of both shore and ports was crucial to the development of Germany's plans. Despite these limitations, the Battle of the Atlantic was characterized by the German use of submarine warfare which was deployed, primarily in the North Atlantic, to destroy as much allied shipping as possible, with the aim of starving the British war economy into submission. The increased calls on the part of the allies for control of Irish ports stemmed from the mass destruction of allied shipping. In June, 1940, alone, German U-Boats "sank 58 ships of nearly 300,000 tons" with similar results in August.² The majority of the calls that criticized Dublin were flowing across the

¹ NAC, RG 25, File 398, Vol. 781, The Irish Press, 14 Aug. 1940.

² Steven Roskill, The Navy at War 1939-1945, (London: Collins Press, 1960), 92.

Atlantic from the neutral United States. As such, this represents an interesting dichotomy between Washington's view of Irish neutrality as compared to that held by Ottawa. Paradoxically, neutral America, with its large Irish catholic population to whom the administration looked for urban votes, nevertheless took a much harsher stance towards De Valera than did Ottawa.

This is not to say that there were not elements within Canada who supported the calls of their neighbours to the south. For example, King received a letter from a Montreal lawyer who asserted that Canada could make a "major contribution by taking appropriate action" that would prod the Irish to not only give the British certain ports and bases but to request that the German and Italian legations be closed.³ There is no indication that King mulled this proposition over with any great thought. The requests from this lawyer was wishful thinking as it was one thing for King to defend and assert Canada's interests but to wade into the murky waters of another nation's affairs, particularly a commonwealth nation, was not a hallmark of King's diplomacy. More to the point, the King government tended to consistently dismiss those who opposed Ireland's choice of neutrality, particularly the Conservative critics. In terms of national unity, King appeared to be unwilling to allow the issue to become divisive.

Apart from these influences, Kelly appeared to have also been instrumental in King's attitude towards the ports issue and Irish neutrality in general. Kelly suggested to King in early October that De Valera appeared to have no other option than to choose neutrality. Kelly had travelled throughout much of the south of Ireland upon his appointment and made numerous inquiries as to what would have occurred if De Valera had led Ireland into the war. The conclusion that he reported back to King was that "The answer in every case has been that he (De Valera) would have been driven from

³ NAC, RG 25, File 398, Vol. 781, W.B. Scott to King, 16 Sept. 1940.

power, and that civil war would have broken out.”⁴ This would have struck a chord in King, as he was quite concerned throughout the war that Canada’s national unity be maintained. The High Commissioner made it known that the main opposition parties were supportive of the governments stance and that contrary to outside opinion, the Irish government was strengthening its defence forces.⁵ The latter was aided, Kelly noted, by the British who were now supplying arms to Ireland and surely had some of their fears allayed by Irish willingness to receive these arms.⁶

The ports issue continued to receive attention from the government when De Valera, in response to a speech from Churchill, declared that “There can no be question of handing over of ports so long as Ireland remains neutral. There can be no question of leasing them. Any attempt to bring pressure to bear on us by any of the belligerents-by Britain-could only result in bloodshed.”⁷ De Valera’s response was consistent with what he had stated all along, namely that Ireland would not relinquish the ports and jeopardize its neutrality. However, Dublin’s stance conflicted with the sense of urgency felt amongst the Royal Navy and the increased calls from Commonwealth nations and from the United States for the use of the ports.

The split between De Valera and Churchill soon became a cause for debate within the Canadian House of Commons some which tested King’s foreign policy towards Ireland. But as weeks of parliamentary debate showed, the ports debate was an issue in which King refused to criticise De

⁴ Ibid, Kelly to King, 4 Oct. 1940.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ David Murray, ed., Documents on Canadian External Relations, VII, Part I (Ottawa, 1974), 453.

Valera, thereby reflecting his policy of letting diplomatic relations remain untroubled. King was not, as the record shows, prepared to make an issue over the ports. As was expected, the Conservatives chose to do so and sided with the British position for the entirety of the war. In particular the Conservative M.P.'s badgered King on numerous issues regarding relations with Ireland. These debates focussed upon the ports issue; the need for better relations with Ireland; the Battle of the Atlantic and whether the loss of Irish ports exposed Canada's navy and merchant marines to unnecessary risks and casualties. In addition, the legations maintained by axis diplomats on Irish soil continued to provoke further discussion between the two parties. Despite the criticism he drew on all of these issues, King remained steadfast in his policy towards Ireland.

King's Irish policy was first probed over the ports issue in November. On 12 November, R.B. Hanson, a Conservative M.P. for York-Sunbury suggested that the Canadian government approach De Valera with a proposal that Ireland lease to Canada certain strategic ports in the south and west that would establish "empire naval stations."⁸ Hanson, believed that such action should be taken as it was clear that British attempts to request Ireland's naval ports had come to no avail and the apparent impasse gave Canada an opportunity to further contribute to the allied cause. Hanson's suggestions made in Parliament came to naught and were not even responded to in question period by King.

Hearne was sensitive to Hanson's comments and informed Dublin of Hanson's reference to the ports and at the same time noted that Hanson "did not return to the subject, and no other member of either House raised the question. It may be that the Prime Minister made it known privately that

⁸ Hansard, House of Commons Debates, Session 1941, Vol. 1, 26-27.

he would not discuss the matter in the House.”⁹ Expanding on King’s actions, Hearne described that King “Handed off Mr. Hanson quite effectively on 12 November, and that itself may have been the reason for the absence of further reference.”¹⁰ Hearne was clearly troubled though and he met with King to discuss the remarks later that evening. Skelton was also contacted the following day to discuss the situation with the Irish High Commissioner. Recounting his visit with the Prime Minister, Hearne stated that King had told him that he “understood Mr. De Valera’s position” nevertheless the Irish High Commissioner was becoming concerned with what Skelton described as “the exaggerations in many Canadian papers.”¹¹ Skelton appeared to understand Hearne’s frustrations and remarked to King that “As a matter of fact, Mr. De Valera had asked Sir John Maffey, the British representative in Ireland, to make any investigations he pleased on the west coast with the aid of police and military forces. No trace whatever was found of any use or attempt at use of the coast by enemy forces.”¹² Hanson’s comments not only raised Hearne’s attention but that of the *Irish Times* as well. In an article that Kelly sent back to external affairs, the Times reported Hanson as stating that the “the failure of Mr. de Valera to cooperate with Britain, in my humble-view, is a valuable contribution to the Axis Powers”¹³ Here was another instance when what was said in Canada was given prominent attention in Ireland.

⁹ Irish National Archives, DFA, File 219/49, Hearne to The Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Dec. 17, 1940.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Murray, op. cit., 453-454.

¹² Ibid, 454.

¹³ NAC, RG 25, File 822-39, Vol. 1949, The Irish Times, 13 Nov. 1940.

In a further attempt to put a lid on the ports issue within Canada and to halt the perception that Ireland was a safe haven for Axis agents, Kelly sent a telegram to King on 15 November. Kelly bluntly cautioned King that an anti-Irish campaign “may be made in Canadian press, based on the erroneous view that Ireland is anti-British because of refusal to hand over ports.”¹⁴ Kelly explained that although neutral, Ireland was not in any way, shape or form pro-German and that sympathy for Britain was continually intensifying. Any attempt to instigate an anti-Irish campaign, in his view, could only be damaging and he recommended that fewer media releases and political comments pertaining to the ports should be made.¹⁵

Shortly after his dispatch to King, Kelly contacted Skelton and explained that Hanson’s comments had received much attention throughout the Irish media. Particularly unsettling for Kelly though was that “the majority of those who spoke to of the matter to me had taken for granted that Mr. Hanson was speaking on behalf of the Canadian people.”¹⁶ Kelly chose to mention one Irish academic’s response to the comments made by Hanson. The response, as noted by Kelly, argued that the implications of the use of the ports either by Britain or even Canada was not realized by those who were pressing for such action. The widely held view was that any such action would lead to German reprisals which would inevitably lead to Dublin seeking military assistance on Irish soil from England. This was something in which Irish opinion was “quite unprepared” as Kelly explained to

¹⁴ Ibid, RG 25, File 398, Vol. 781, The High Commissioner for Canada in Ireland to the Secretary of State for External Affairs,(No.33), 15 Nov. 1940.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, RG 25, File 822-39, Vol. 1949, Kelly to Skelton, Nov 19, 1940.

Skelton.¹⁷

Kelly's briefings, along with Skelton's and King's understanding of Ireland's situation, allowed Canadian policy to adjust to Dublin's warnings and act accordingly. Indeed, upon meeting with the Irish High Commissioner Skelton summed up the Irish view to King in a succinct passage:

The policy regarding the ports is an incident of the policy of neutrality. It would bar handing over the ports to any belligerent regardless of how friendly the feeling to that belligerent might be, simply because such a gesture in each and every case would mean the end of neutrality.¹⁸

Although external affairs and King refrained from chastising Dublin during this period, the ports issue would not go away as German U-boat success continued. In one particular incident, C.D. Howe, Minister of Munitions and Supply was rescued not far from the Irish coast after the ship he was sailing on was torpedoed by a German U-Boat. Fortunately for the King government, Howe and his party were rescued by another allied liner. On 18 December, the *Montreal Gazette* took the opportunity to condemn Dublin by writing "In the meantime the fact will not be lost on Canada that had Great Britain been permitted to regain possession of naval bases at Berehaven, Cobh, and Lough Swilly, in the Irish Free State, the Western Prince might not have been torpedoed."¹⁹ These remarks did not go unnoticed by external affairs as they monitored media commentary upon the topic of Irish neutrality. The *Gazette's* criticism of Irish policy was given further prominence two days after the first critique when it described that "the attitude of the Eire government is untenable."²⁰ Then, in an argument that was far from exact, the editorial asserted:

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Murray, op. cit., 455.

¹⁹ NAC, RG 25, File 822-39, Vol. 1949, *Montreal Gazette*, 18 Dec. 1940

²⁰ Ibid, *Montreal Gazette*, 20 Dec. 1940

..... by refusing to co-operate with the Commonwealth to the extent of returning to Britain for the duration of the war, the bases which Britain voluntarily surrendered to the Irish Free State is maintaining a stand prejudicial to Canada and is increasing perils which Canadians face when they travel from home to the British Isles.²¹

The *Gazette* believed that either Ireland must be either for or against Britain. And in a conclusion that must have made King and Skelton queasy, the paper suggested that by allowing Canada to mediate Ireland would remain worthy of “her status as a unit in a commonwealth of free nations.”²² By this logic it could be construed that the King government was at times not always as supportive of Britain while defending her own fiscal and military interests as the earlier BCATP debate had also demonstrated.

The King government continued to signal that it did not wish to become involved in this debate. At home, King quashed a proposal that would have permitted a group of Irish-Canadians from Winnipeg to make a radio appeal to Dublin urging the Irish to turn over the ports.²³ From Dublin, Kelly opined that any action by the British government which would result in the occupation of the ports was ill-advised. He also recommended to King that before any decision was made by the British that Canada should be consulted first.²⁴

The position of the King government would continually be tested throughout the winter as the battle of the Atlantic escalated in March 1941. Although there had been a lull in the number of allied ships sunk in early 1941, 41 ships had been sunk by the end of March resulting in the loss of

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ryle Dwyer, Irish Neutrality and the U.S.A. 1939-1943, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan 1977), 92.

²⁴ Murray, op. cit., 455.

243,000 tons and further straining Anglo-Irish relations.²⁵ As acknowledged by Nicholas Manergh, there were frequent and sometimes provocative references made towards the ports in the British Parliament and the overseas dominions. In particular, the Conservative party of Canada maintained its views that the ports should be given to Britain. To that end, the leader of the Conservative party, R.J. Manion, an Irish-Catholic, sponsored a movement of Irish-Canadians whose purpose was to lobby Dublin, with the aim of informing Dublin that Irish-Canadians were firmly behind Britain. Manion was hoping to arrange a meeting of “representative Irish Catholic Canadians” in Ottawa in the hopes of drafting a cable that would be sent to Dublin.²⁶ In a move that King would have balked at, Manion stated he did not support dividing Canadians into racial or religious groups, but in the case of Irish neutrality, it was necessary to do so temporarily.²⁷

Kelly warned King that public mistrust of Britain was growing due to the fear that the British would eventually seize the ports. The High Commissioner suggested that it would be in Britain’s advantage to strengthen relations with Dublin and, if possible, London should consider arming Irish troops in the event of an invasion. If this was not possible then the British press should construct more amicable relations with Dublin so as “to offset German propaganda.” Kelly related to King that the Germans had recently bombed Ireland but rumours had been circulating that they had been dropped by inebriated Canadian pilots in the Royal Air Force.²⁸ It must also be noted that Kelly had

²⁵ Roskill, *The Navy at War*, 121.

²⁶ NAC, RG 25, File 822-39, Vol. 1949. *Montreal Gazette*, 7 Jan. 1941.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, RG 25, File 398, Vol. 781, The High Commissioner for Canada in Ireland to the Secretary of State for External Affairs (No.4), 16 Jan. 1941.

consistently maintained in his telegrams to King that the Irish government should not be chastised and attempted to advise Canada not to endorse the tactics employed by London. Therefore, King must have silently agreed with his High Commissioner's advice. After all, if King was opposed to Kelly's advice he could have been recalled back to Ottawa and replaced with someone less amiable towards the Irish position.

Ultimately, what could be considered the official Canadian line was written by Skelton in an intriguing letter to the press censor of Canada. Skelton wrote that the use of the Irish ports as bases would be advantageous for the Allies and in preventing submarine and air attacks on allied shipping, but he also relayed the motives behind Ireland's choice of neutrality which he felt were essential to understand. Skelton defended Dublin's policy asserting that it did not stem from an anti-British bias or sympathy for the Germans. Instead, according to Skelton, the Irish had been through "three wars in twenty-five years the country is anxious, if at all possible, to avoid getting into another war."²⁹ In addition, even though he suspected that Ireland could not defend itself in the event of an invasion, the media and a significant element of Irish public opinion had rallied behind the government's policy. Then in a comment that betrayed the guiding principle for both Skelton and King, the under-secretary exclaimed that "It seems to me reasonable that Canadians should be given an opportunity for making up their minds on a question which is of great importance to Canada."³⁰ The quote indicates that the King government could not openly critique a position that it believed must be decided by the Irish people. Perhaps, to have done anything else would damage the gains made by King in establishing a distinct Canadian foreign policy within the Commonwealth.

²⁹ Ibid, RG 25, File 822-39, Vol. 1949, Skelton to Charpentier, 20 Jan. 1941.

³⁰ Ibid.

The ports issue took a curious turn in early February 1940, when King received news from Kelly which thrust Canada into the environs of diplomatic bargaining. In a secret telegram, Kelly detailed that he had met with Walsh, De Valera's principal advisor, and was privy to the conditions that might influence De Valera to abandon neutrality. Walsh was of the view that Ireland might abandon its position if the United States entered into the war; and if Ireland's role was "deemed indispensable to shorten the war"; but on stiff conditions: Ireland was to be armed; "Abandonment of partition and absolute independence of whole of Ireland to be guaranteed."³¹ Apparently the King government did not act upon this and for good reason. Simply put, these conditions would not have gone over well in Northern Ireland and could even be construed as blackmail by King's opponents. If anything, these conditions seem to indicate that Walsh had an inflated sense of what Ireland could contribute to the allied war effort or perhaps he put the proposals out with the full knowledge that the demands would never be met.

In Ottawa, the Conservatives shifted their attacks on King's foreign policy from the ports issue, perhaps because King had refused to budge and was unlikely to do so. Instead, they began to question his position on the need for a High Commissioner within Ireland. This, in itself, was bizarre considering that Kelly's appointment had been made over a year prior and was an established fact. Nevertheless, the question was asked why did Canada need a representative in Dublin?, what was the cost and what exactly was Kelly doing there?. These questions, asked during a Parliamentary session on 25 February were mainly orchestrated by Hanson who also emphasized that Ireland's

³¹ Ibid, The High Commissioner for Canada in Ireland to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, (No.7), 3 Feb. 1941.

position was far from popular amongst many.³² King's rebuttal was firm and he did not waver from his original reasons for appointing a High Commissioner. Namely to have a representative in all of the dominions and to inform the government of any situation that would be of interest, as well, as to look after the interests of Canadians.

King was also quick to state that Canada had received information which was of value from its sources in Ireland, thereby justifying the mission. He added that "Through the reports we have received from our high commissioner and his secretary we have been in a position to assess the situation in Ireland itself in a manner we would not have found possible had we not had the inside information given us."³³ Again King had not attempted to distance himself or his foreign policy from that he had initiated. He had not only brushed away his critics in Parliament but had also emphasized that the Irish legation was of use and would not be touched.

As the port issue died down, an important change arose that concerned two important variables influencing Ottawa's position towards Ireland. The irreplaceable Skelton had died of a heart attack in January and Kelly had passed away in Dublin in early March. What must be noted was that after both of their deaths, King's position did not change, which would indicate that although Skelton and Kelly were both important in shaping Ottawa's policy towards Dublin, ultimately it was King who determined policy and chose to maintain friendly relations. Upon Kelly's death, King was quick to honour the deceased High Commissioner and signaled in the House of Commons the value of Kelly's reports as well as the "great satisfaction to myself and my colleagues to note how warmly

³² Hansard, House of Commons Debates, Session 1941, Vol. 1, 1014.

³³ Ibid.

he has been welcomed by the people of Eire.”³⁴ De Valera promptly sent his condolences as well noting Kelly’s “devotion in fostering close and cordial relations between Canada and Ireland.”³⁵ This latter statement would not have been made if relations had been strained between the two nations and demonstrates that despite the volatility that surrounded the ports issue, relations did not deteriorate.

The deaths of Skelton and Kelly, however, did not end criticism towards King’s Irish policy. Newspapers, such as the *Saint Catherines Standard*, suggested that King appoint the former Conservative leader, Doctor Robert Manion as the new Canadian High Commissioner to Dublin. The *Standard’s* editors were of the view that Manion was of Irish Catholic descent and would adopt a more favourable stance towards Britain vis-a-vis the ports, perhaps he would even help Britain gain the ports.³⁶ Similar views were echoed by the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail*. King did not select Manion and waited until the summer before replacing Kelly, in the meantime Garland took over official duties. While King waited, the Conservatives went back on the attack in Parliament. Not only was Canada’s policy towards the ports scrutinized, but the Tories also questioned the losses to Canadian shipping in the Atlantic and whether or not the ports in question were a factor in these losses. As well, Ireland’s role in the Commonwealth was questioned by the Tories.

The Conservatives, sensing that they had a topic from which they could garner public support,

³⁴ Ibid. Session 1941, Vol. II, 1354.

³⁵ NAC, King Papers, Series J4, Vol. 284. c195517, n.d.

³⁶ Ibid, King Papers, Series J2, Vol. 155 File Ireland-CAN., HIGH COMM., TO Vol 5 (I-453), 1941.

escalated the temperature of the debate. For example, one Tory asked whether or not “Canadian or British seamen drowned as a result of the lack of protection by the use of the Irish ports?”.³⁷ Not caught off guard, King defused this thrust by responding that if there was a “useful purpose” to asking and answering questions then these should be asked and answered.³⁸ Implying clearly that they did not meet the test, King further surmised that, if the opposite of this was the case then these questions “should neither be asked nor answered.”³⁹ Again King did not waver in his respect for Ireland’s right to make its own policies on the issue.

By April the issue of the ports in Canadian media and politics began to dissipate. Nevertheless, for many Conservatives and Empire loyalists this was a passionate issue, and perhaps critics of King’s foreign policy felt that the ports issue marked the soft underbelly of his foreign policy. King’s opponents were unable to justify relations with a nation that would deny Britain the ports. In their view, if relations were to be maintained with Ireland then at the very least Canada should use its presence to persuade the Irish otherwise. Neither argument swayed King nor changed his approach. Although there is not any source which records King’s exact feelings over this issue in any detail, his words spoken in the House of Commons and his inactions tend to indicate that he perceived this to be a domestic issue for Ireland alone to decide not Canada. In particular, King was well aware that the ports issue within Ireland was not only tied to commonwealth autonomy, but to national unity as well. Both matters were not only of special importance to King but were also

³⁷ Hansard, House of Commons Debates, Session 1941, Vol. II, 1876.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

protracted concerns for him. Therefore, although King may have been at odds with Ireland on the ports issue, he did not follow London's lead on issues clearly linked to the matters of exercising commonwealth autonomy and preserving national unity.

Chapter IV: Maintaining the Course

Relations between the two Commonwealth states in 1941 was characterized by numerous but much less contentious issues than the ports debate. Most importantly, successors to Skelton and Kelly were named: Norman Robertson and John Kearney were respectively appointed Under-Secretary of State and High Commissioner. Their appointments marked not only a smooth transition but emphasized that King had not shifted his policy towards Ireland. At the same time, while the replacing of both Skelton and Kelly went relatively smoothly, King temporarily became involved in a conscription debate in Northern Ireland which had raised emotions in Dublin. His involvement was risky but King was nervous that any conscription debate in Northern Ireland would become an issue within Canada with negative ramifications. As a result, King did not stand aside but waded into the issue and to his delight the issue was soon resolved. Sensing that he may have had an opportunity to alleviate a controversial situation King also attempted, once more, to find a solution to the ports issue. That King chose to do this indicates that he must have felt confident not only in his Irish policy but also in the rapport he had achieved with De Valera. Although King's scheme failed it demonstrated that rather than isolate the Irish on issues he disagreed with, he was willing to maintain a friendly dialogue. This was characteristic of the Canadian policy of progression that continued unabated throughout 1941 and differentiated it from its allies.

The spring of 1941 was a period of transition for the Canadian legation in Dublin. Nevertheless, during the period between March and July while King waited before choosing a new High Commissioner, Garland acted admirably well in place of the deceased Kelly, continuing to keep Ottawa abreast of events within Ireland. The new Under-Secretary, Norman Robertson had to rely on Garland until a new appointment was announced but that did not mean that he looked upon Garland as a temporary plug in a hole. Upon assuming his new position as under-secretary of state

for external affairs, Robertson contacted Garland for a comprehensive report regarding the situation in Ireland. In this report Robertson wanted to be kept abreast of public opinion and the steps that had been implemented to defend Irish neutrality if it was challenged. For the first time ever, the King government also wanted the Canadian legation to discuss and report on the activities of the German legation in Dublin.¹ In particular Robertson observed that Garland might wish to focus on the German “Minister, his personality, and activities, and on the work of the members of his staff.”² Demonstrating both curiosity and shrewdness, Robertson wanted to know of the standing of the German minister amongst the Irish people and whether or not the British war effort could be spied upon through the English press, personal visits from agents using the ferry service and whether or not it was possible for information to be transmitted back to Germany.³ Upon preparing this report Robertson ensured that Garland would not resort to underhand tactics to achieve this information but to ascertain it through public sources. The reason for all this, as stated by Robertson, was so that “this Department and other interested services, may have the benefit of your views on the general situation in Eire.”⁴ Garland received no other instructions from Robertson which indicated any change in Canadian policy.

Garland submitted his report on 9 July to Robertson in which he noted that the German legation had a staff of five and detailed their identities and positions. In addition, Garland noted that the

¹ NAC, RG 24, File 8712, Vol. 2748. Robertson to Garland May 13, 1941.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

number of Germans in Ireland numbered from “506 to 575. About 170 of these are refugees.”⁵ In particular, Garland surmised that the German minister avoided public attention due to the fact that “he is not welcomed by the class in Dublin within which he would normally move.” This isolation had also been compounded by the bombing of Dublin on 31 May which “created a strong anti-German sentiment among the vast “tenement” class within which hitherto a great deal of pro-German support existed.”⁶ Indeed, public reaction was so outraged at the bombing the Irish government had to double the guards around the German legation and at the German Minister’s residence.⁷

Although the King government would have been pleased to hear that the German legation had to keep a low profile due to German unpopularity, Garland had troubling news as well. Garland cautioned that the Germans, beyond doubt, were involved in espionage and propaganda and had links with the I.R.A. In his report Garland concluded “Undoubtedly there is danger in allowing Axis diplomatists to be stationed in this country with full diplomatic privileges.”⁸ The report closed by stating that “It is evident that the Axis Legations in Eire are important sources of German information, and a menace to our cause.”⁹ This is puzzling though as there is no record of either King nor Robertson acting upon this but his report was passed on to the department of national defence. Regardless of these cautions, King did not appear to waver and adjust his policy

⁵ Ibid, Garland to Robertson, (No. 272), 9 July. 1941.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

accordingly. King did have options. For instance, he could have further postponed sending a replacement for Kelly or he could have even closed the Canadian legation in Dublin. He chose neither but set about choosing a successor to Kelly. Again King had been handed an easy opportunity to change his position towards Irish neutrality but had again refused to do so.

Garland's role as acting High Commissioner came to an end in July when Ottawa announced that John Kearney would be appointed to the position vacated by Kelly. Like his predecessor, Kearney was a lawyer from Quebec and of Irish-Catholic extraction. On 17 July, 1941 King personally asked Kearney to take over the position of Canadian High Commissioner to Ireland. Kearney's diaries give an interesting account on his thoughts of the Irish situation and they shed light on gaps in official accounts. Upon learning of the possible trade of the ports for a united Ireland, Kearney remarked that he hoped this would be possible but described the Premier of Northern Ireland, Craigavon, as being uncompromising.¹⁰ Following this comment, Kearney noted that while going "through files of correspondence between the office of the Canadian High Commissioner to Eire and Ottawa" he observed that the "policy of neutrality has practically 100% backing in Eire."¹¹

Kearney's initial diary entries reveal, like Kelly, an unwillingness to adopt a hard-line approach towards Dublin or even any distaste for the wartime policies of De Valera. Upon his appointment, Kearney began to acquaint himself with the key diplomatic personalities with whom he would have to deal in Dublin. Kearney was not overly impressed with his American and British counterparts in Dublin as he concluded that "the British, like the Americans, are represented probably by a has-

¹⁰ NAC, MG 30, E 215, Kearney Diaries, Vol. I, 24 July, 1941.

¹¹ Ibid.

been.”¹² This would indicate that not only did Kearney disagree with Anglo-American policy towards Ireland but felt that part of the problem was their representation within Dublin. Apart from questioning the capabilities of his counterparts, Kearney was not reluctant to emphasize his own views concerning the ports. During one of his first discussions with a British official in Dublin, Kearney related that as far as the ports were concerned “my suggestion was that Ireland should lease them to nobody.”¹³ It was also added that the idea that the ports should be leased to Canada was a “far-fetched idea” and would be a “political football in Dublin.”¹⁴ Here was a new Canadian High Commissioner who clearly disagreed with American and British policy and was not reluctant to express his views. Neither punishment nor even protest was forthcoming from Ottawa. King was not only content to maintain his policy towards Ireland but to maintain a High Commissioner who would disagree with American and British policy. King may well have liked to see Dublin offer the ports to Britain, but it was apparent that he was not following British policy on this matter, nor had he appointed a High Commissioners who harboured sentiments in line with those of London.

However, prior to the posting of Kearney “a particularly touchy situation developed in May 1941” as the British government considered whether or not conscription should be extended to Northern Ireland. Such action would surely have antagonized the De Valera government and the Irish populace to a considerable degree, particularly when closed door negotiations suggested that the price for Irish entry into the war was the return of Ulster. In King, De Valera found a kindred spirit who himself was wary if not afraid over the possibility of conscription in Canada. Indeed, in a

¹² Ibid, 31 July, 1941.

¹³ Ibid, 4 August, 1941.

¹⁴ Ibid.

message to King, De Valera explained his reasons for opposing conscription in Northern Ireland:

There is reason to apprehend that the threat of conscription in Northern Ireland is immediate and serious.

If the threat were to be carried out, it would bring about a situation the end of which no one can see. The friendly feeling and sympathy for Great Britain which now exists in Ireland would be destroyed.

The Irish people feel that it would be an outrage against democracy to force the Nationalist population to fight for a freedom which they have not themselves been permitted to enjoy. Nothing could be more calculated to disturb profoundly the feelings of the Irish people and to cause endless bitterness, and perhaps, violence.

The situation which has now arisen shows the essential evil and odiousness of partition.

Personal to Prime Minister

Irish government has done and is doing a great many things to help the British in a very real way.¹⁵

This message was delivered by Hearne who waited for King's response. King chose not to make any commitment towards the issue but recorded that "I thought I could read between the lines of his communication and he, doubtless, would read between the lines of mine."¹⁶

Privately, King remarked to Hearne that when it suited Germany's needs, Ireland's neutrality would not make any difference in what sort of action Germany would take. Here, King was absolutely right. The Germans had drawn up invasion plans and, more to the point, they had already invaded numerous neutral countries. Hearne stressed to King that regardless of this, the imposition of conscription would lead to substantial negative consequences.¹⁷ And in a private thought King mused that "Though I did not say so, I agree with him and further feel that it would have

¹⁵ David Murray, ed., Documents on Canadian External Relations, VII Part I (Ottawa, 1974), 456-457.

¹⁶ Ibid, 457.

¹⁷ Ibid.

repercussions in Canada which would be unfortunate.”¹⁸ What is most provoking in this conversation is King’s statement concerning eventual German plans towards Ireland and the fact that he chose not to let this belief dictate a policy which was more in line with that espoused by both the British and Americans.

Although he did not fully share his feelings over this matter to Hearne, King felt strongly that the imposition of conscription in Northern Ireland “would have repercussions in Canada which would be unfortunate.”¹⁹ On 24 May, King met with Malcolm MacDonald, the British High Commissioner, at King’s estate at Kingsmere. The two had a long talk in which they addressed the possibility of conscription in Northern Ireland. King, with the approval of MacDonald, stated that he was “thinking of wiring Churchill myself to speak of the possible effect of this step on American opinion and of its repercussions in Canada.”²⁰ The following day King had a personally drafted despatch sent off to Churchill making Churchill aware of his opposition to conscription in northern Ireland.

I understand that you will be considering with colleagues of the War Cabinet representations recently made regarding conscription in Northern Ireland. I naturally do not wish to interfere in any matter which might be regarded as exclusively one for the Government of the United Kingdom. I am sure, however, you will not misunderstand my motive if I suggest that, in case the step has not already been taken, it would be well to seek from the Ambassador at Washington an expression of his views as to the possible effect, especially at this very critical moment, upon Irish-American opinion and attitude in the United States of a decision by the British Government to enforce conscription in any part of Ireland. My colleagues and I would be grateful, if possible repercussions which such a step might have upon public opinion in Canada might also be considered. We are at the moment engaged in a recruiting campaign for further voluntary enlistments in Canada’s armed forces for overseas service. The more it is possible to avoid the conscription issue becoming a matter of acute controversy the less difficult I feel sure will be the task of maintaining Canadian

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ J.W. Pickersgill, The Mackenzie King Record Volume I 1939-1944, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 218.

²⁰ Ibid.

unity.²¹

King need not have worried as Churchill announced on 26 May that the British government would not institute conscription in Northern Ireland. Upon closer examination, King's letter was far from altruistic as the consequences of conscription in Ireland were not his main concern. More than anything else, King brooded over any possible spillover effect into Canada from this affair, with its potentially dangerous ramifications for Canadian national unity. In addition, the letter also demonstrated how King fancied himself as an intermediary between the Americans and the British, while being sensitive to Irish-American opinion.

Indeed, King was so pleased with himself that he informed Hearne of the wire sent to Churchill and asked him to secretly communicate this to De Valera. King recorded in his diary that "if the British government learned I had told de Valera of having wired Churchill, it would certainly destroy the influence I might have when perhaps much needed at some future time."²² This passage tends to illustrate that King was willing to use his position within the Commonwealth either tacitly to support Dublin or to apply pressure on those who wished to maintain a hard-line approach to Ireland.

In his self-confidence, King took it upon himself to even offer a possible resolution to the ports debate. King's suggestion, according to Fred McEvoy, was based on the following premises: that De Valera would offer his gratitude to London for halting the conscription discussion, Ireland would

²¹ Murray, op. cit., 457-458.

²² NAC, King Papers, Diary, 27 May, 1941.

enter into the war, and the partition would cease to exist.²³ None of this assumed that Canada would play the helpful-fixer role, but that the Americans would play the key role. As King outlined in his diary:

If Ireland was unwilling to give Britain the bases, she might allow the Americans to occupy them. But I would go a step further and say that if de Valera was prepared to oppose his people in the common interest, Andrews, the present Premier of Northern Ireland, might be persuaded to take a similar stand against his people in seeking to bring about complete self-government in Ireland. I said I was not laying down a programme but was thinking of something that might happen spontaneously; in other words, the whole Irish situation be re-adjusted while the war was on. A united Ireland with Britain or America getting the use of the bases and all Ireland helping to defeat Germany.²⁴

King, while a fairly astute politician, was letting his emotions get the better of him. His solution not only assumed an American entry into the war but expected that De Valera would reverse his position, and that the British would even allow Ulster to be reincorporated into the Republic. Surely, King must have remembered the bitter Irish Home Rule debates of 1914. Regardless of the absurdities of the plan, Hearne, in perfunctory fashion, stated that he would inform De Valera of King's views. Though this led nowhere it was an interesting chapter in relations between the two sides, as De Valera had apparently felt that he had a strong enough rapport to turn to King with his problems and King believed that he had some influence on De Valera.

Further evidence that De Valera and King remained on fairly good terms, despite their wartime policy differences, is illustrated by King's visit to Britain in late August, 1941. During the initial days of his visit, King read over a draft of a speech Churchill had been preparing. Upon reading the speech King persuaded Churchill to omit a reference that might have offended Irish opinion in

²³ Fred McEvoy, "Canada And Ireland In World War II," The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 5 2 (1977): 206-227, 211.

²⁴ Ibid.

North America. King's record of this conversation was that :

In reading the speech, I noticed Churchill had referred to a bay where the conference was held reminding him of Scotland, also of the coasts of Iceland and Greenland. After Iceland, he had said: not Ireland. I thought this reference unwise and thought references to Iceland, Greenland and Ireland should be left out. To be careful not to antagonize the Irish in the U.S. and in Canada. He agreed I was right and struck it out.²⁵

As this diary entry illustrates, it was acutely apparent that King not only wished to avoid inflaming Irish sensitivities on the international level but on a domestic level as well.

While King was in England, Kearney met with De Valera on 26 August, and told the latter that King had mentioned the possibility of visiting Ireland. According to Kearney's description, De Valera was delighted at the prospect and instructed Kearney to let King know that he could either come publicly or privately.²⁶ Kearney, in response, notified Vincent Massey in London and both men mulled over the advantages and disadvantages of a meeting. Upon weighing them, Kearney pushed for King to visit Dublin and communicated to King that "after my chat with Mr. de Valera I feel that his desire to see you is so genuine that he would be, to say the least, disappointed if you did not come."

King's response was dictated while he traveled north to Scotland. He had already been in contact with the Irish Representative in London, Dulanty, who had also expressed his desire to have King visit Ireland. Indeed, King even recorded in his diary that he had a special dream that had symbolized Ireland and he took this vision as "being sent as a date of departure and the route to be

²⁵ NAC, King Papers, Diary, Aug. 24, 1941.

²⁶ Ibid. King Papers, Series J1, Vol. 307, High Commissioner for Canada in Ireland to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. 27 Aug. 1941.

via Ireland.”²⁷ The following day King wrote to Kearney that “I have all along cherished the hope that it might be possible for me to visit Eire and, in particular, to have a friendly talk with the Prime Minister.”²⁸ While in London, King spoke with Dulanty, the Irish High Commissioner. King’s recollection of the conversation was that Dulanty “Said that 95% of Ireland were sympathetic with the British and wanted to see the British win but equally 95% were for neutrality.”²⁹ In addition, Dulanty asserted that entry into the war would lead to civil war and “the whole of Dublin would be destroyed in a night” by the Germans.³⁰

In an abrupt change of mind, King became non-committal about choosing a date to visit Ireland. He informed Dulanty that his schedule would not permit him the time to visit but he did leave the option to visit open. King also decided to inform Churchill of his conversation with Dulanty so as to get his opinion. Churchill’s characterization of Dulanty was less than flattering as he reasoned that the Irish Commissioner was “troublesome, that anything that was said to him, he thought, got out and subsequently went to the Germans.”³¹ King, somewhat surprisingly, opined that he had no desire to go to Ireland “except for purposes of my departure” Churchill, expanding on this, exclaimed that the Irish had put themselves into an “incredible position” which “would not be forgiven for generations.” but that Roosevelt was doing as much as possible to help alleviate the

²⁷ NAC, King Papers, Diary, 28 Aug. 1941.

²⁸ Ibid, King Papers, Series J1, Vol. 307, King to Kearney, 29 Aug. 1941.

²⁹ Ibid, King Papers, Diary, 28 Aug. 1941.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. 28 Aug. 1941.

situation.³² Regardless of his comments, Churchill did not attempt to persuade King to forsake any visit to Ireland. On the contrary, King suggested if De Valera wished to meet with him, he could do so at Foynes before King left for home.

King also learned that De Valera had contacted Mrs. Hall Kelly and relayed his hopes that King would visit Ireland where he would receive a warm welcome. King's response remained consistent in that the most "I could do was possibly to cross by Foynes in which event de Valera could come to meet me just for a personal conversation."³³ King was further aggravated by press reports that mentioned his conversation with Dulanty. He fretted that the public would assume that he had sent for Dulanty and that the Irish Commissioner must have passed the news of their conversation to the press. King concluded that he was happy "to have the excuse of not going by Ireland, at the same time having genuinely considered the possibility."³⁴ Nonetheless, during the same period Kearney was asked by King to inform De Valera that upon further confirmation of his departure date he would be able to alter his schedule. In the meantime Kearney was asked to pass on this information to De Valera and express "my warm appreciation the cordiality of his words of welcome."³⁵ Thus two versions of events emerge as King's diary entries indicate both his initial eagerness and then unwillingness to visit Ireland. Although he settled on the latter, he never fully ruled out a visit and his instructions to the legation in Dublin do not indicate any displeasure towards De Valera or Ireland. Ultimately, King did not visit De Valera but not once is there any record that he did this as

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid, 29 Aug. 1941.

³⁴ Ibid,

³⁵ Ibid, King Papers, Series JI, Vol. 307, King to Kearney, 29 Aug. 1941

a spiteful gesture nor did he reveal in his diary entries any clear change in attitudes towards Dublin.

Whereas King visited Britain in August, Kearney had just begun to settle in to his duties and took a couple of months to visit throughout the island and meet with dignitaries. After a period of acclimatization, Kearney submitted a report to Robertson which detailed the current situation within Ireland. As the report shows, Kearney had been busy meeting with De Valera, the leaders of the opposition parties, British and American diplomats, not to mention leaders of the Catholic and Protestant churches. While stating that his grasp of the situation was probably incomplete, Kearney tackled the neutrality issue and noted, accurately enough, that the Irish were “solidly entrenched behind neutrality” and reasoning that it was “probably the first occasion on which they have been united.”³⁶ Despite this fact, the report stated that the Irish were increasingly pro-British.

While nothing among the aforementioned facts was entirely new, Kearney’s report disclosed a willingness to engage in secret talks aimed at finding a compromise which might bring Ireland into the war. Kearney had met with the Irish minister for external affairs, Walshe, and probed his reaction on the feasibility of a few possibilities. Walshe was vociferous in his assertion that any deal would have to include the whole of the north being reincorporated with the south. In Walshe’s view “no such half way measure would be entertained.”³⁷ This response could not have come as a surprise as Dublin had strongly indicated that the any price for Irish entry into the war must mean the end of partition. Kearney had sought to draw out Walshe’s attitudes and did so effectively. In the process, Kearney learned that an arrangement, in which the Americans played the lead role, that would allow the allies access to Irish port and air facilities in exchange for Irish national unity might

³⁶ NAC, RG 25, File 398, Vol. 781, Kearney to Robertson, 17 Oct. 1941.

³⁷ Ibid.

be possible.³⁸ The reason why the Irish preferred American intervention was out of distrust and fear that once the British were re-established in Ireland they would remain, although as Kearney observed, the agreement contemplated American entry into the war.

Kearney assumed, perhaps not unreasonably, that Walshe was voicing the beliefs held by De Valera and his government and approached the British High Commissioner Maffey to ascertain his view of the matter. Maffey suggested that if Kearney had sensed any sort of encouragement from Walshe then De Valera might be approached. Kearney never seized the opportunity as De Valera again publicly reaffirmed Ireland's position of neutrality.³⁹ Consequently, Walshe retreated from his earlier position stating that in light of De Valera's speech, it would be inopportune to deviate from the policy of neutrality.⁴⁰ Kearney chose not to pursue the matter further but informed Robertson that he was "watching for an opportunity and in the meantime feeling out the possible reaction in other responsible quarters in Ireland."⁴¹ While Kearney's queries were not fruitful, there was ample evidence, in his view, that Canadian policy was on the mark. He noted that the Irish were as well disposed as ever towards Canada, noting that "Mr. de Valera has declared that the Department of Secretary of State in the United States has not the understanding of the Irish situation which the Department of Secretary of State in Canada possesses."⁴² Kearney's memorandum thus brought into high relief, Canada's increasingly bold role in secret negotiations succeeding at least

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

in being viewed favourably by the Irish government. Such a role would not have been possible if relations had been in a state of decline, it was apparent that Ottawa's policies had created a niche whereby Canadian officials had a tangible role to play in between the United States and Britain.

This niche was maintained as Canadian policy remained unchanged. Nevertheless, the debate within Canada over Ireland's wartime policies began again in late October, and thus the year closed out much as it had begun. Irish policies were referred to and in particular comments towards the German legation in Dublin were raised by R.B. Hanson who had also fired the first salvo in the House of Commons over the ports issue. Hearne learned of Hanson's remarks and contacted Norman Robertson to inform him that Hanson's comments that "Germany maintains a diplomatic mission at Dublin. In normal times its personnel never exceeded fifty. Today, I am told, there are upward of 2,000 attached to the German mission in Eire."⁴³ Hearne countered that the actual number of members within the German legation was five and that the number had not increased since the outbreak of the war.⁴⁴ Hearne did not have to worry as Garland's report to Robertson, regarding the German legation in Dublin, noted that the German legation consisted of five persons all of whom, according to Garland, kept a low profile.

Hanson's comments though were a harbinger of those that would follow in the House of Commons. In early November the government's Irish policy was again scrutinized by the Conservatives. However, a noticeable pattern was emerging in that King again dismissed these attacks. The Conservative line of questioning remained fixed upon the losses of Canadian ships and war material as a result of Irish neutrality. Hoping to catch King on his loyalty to the defence of

⁴³ NAC, King Papers, Series J1, Vol. 307, Hearne to Robertson, 29 Oct. 1941.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Britain, Church argued that the defence of Ireland was the defence of Britain. And in an argument which would not have gained him much support in Ireland, Church asserted that “Cromwell, William of Orange, Pitt and Castlereagh” had known of Ireland’s importance and “in our time” Lloyd George knew it as well.⁴⁵ In Church’s view it was now time to do something about Ireland for if it was not for Ulster “Hitler would have won Ireland long ago.”⁴⁶ Probably without even realizing it, Church’s comments were more detrimental for the allied cause than they were helpful. More to the point, they were ignored by the King government as government policy remained firm.

1941 marked a hectic year in relations between the two nations. It was initially characterized by a transition as replacements were sought for Skelton and Kelly. It was apparent though that the King government was satisfied with the policy it had followed with Dublin and chose to maintain this policy by appointing Kearney who appeared to share the same views as his predecessor regarding both Canadian policy and Irish neutrality. Also, as Robertson’s instructions illustrate, it was clear that the King government was not averse to monitoring the role of the Axis diplomats in Ireland so as to keep abreast of any possible threat. It was also apparent that King monitored Irish politics closely as the conscription issue demonstrated. National unity was paramount to King and the ramifications of conscription in Ireland could have had spillover effects within Canada, or so King mused. Although King’s entry into the conscription issue was both discreet and far from altruistic, the aftermath also demonstrated that King felt he could influence De Valera as his meeting with Hearne and his diary entry indicate. In addition, although King opted not to meet De Valera, he left his options to do so open and his instructions to Kearney show that he had no ill will towards De

⁴⁵ Hansard, House of Commons Debates, Session 1941, Vol. II, 4177.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Valera. More to the point, King's diary was his own refuge of sorts and as his entries reveal, he was not averse to recording his sentiments with great detail. If King had developed any sort of dislike for De Valera or for Irish policy in general it would more than likely have been noted. Perhaps most interesting of all is Churchill's mention of Roosevelt's support. This comment betrayed the fact that the United States, while neutral, was lending more political support than Canada was to London's attempts to obtain Irish support for the allies. It was evident that on both a domestic front and on the international front, King would follow his own policy vis-a-vis Irish neutrality.

Chapter V: An Anomalous Situation-The N.R.M.A. Debate

There were few contentious issues between Ottawa and Dublin during the dark days of the war that extended from 1942 to 1943. Indeed, even the Conservatives seemed quiescent as compared to their earlier attacks on the government's Irish policies which remained unchanged. Indeed, there was enough calm to allow for a brief discussion amongst Canadian officials concerning humanitarian post-war expectations of Ireland. Yet, it must be noted that the King government continued to differ in its approach to Ireland as opposed to the Americans and the British, thereby tacitly asserting its own foreign policy.

There was however another instance in which conscription acted as a difficult conundrum for policy makers. It developed, however significantly, different than the 1941 crisis as this debate began to affect Irish citizens residing here in a very direct way. Nonetheless, the issue was resolved and served as further evidence that both nations were able to work out their concerns both timely and amiably. More to the point, it illustrated that Canadian policy towards Ireland remained flexible and accommodating.

After December 7, 1941 the United States entered into the war. This was noteworthy in that prior thrusts by the Canadian government had led to feelers by some Irish officials that upon American entry into the war, an agreement could possibly be formulated that would result in Irish entry into the war. Churchill sent a stirring cable to De Valera saying this was the hour or never. External Affairs was hopeful that Dublin could be persuaded. It was not long before Norman Robertson was reporting to Kearney a more jaundiced view from Ottawa. Leading into the subject ever so gently, Robertson noted that "Irish questions continue to be discussed from time to time in the Canadian

press; on the whole with restraint and intelligence, although there are certain exceptions to this.”¹ The under-secretary remarked to Kearney that while the Americans had entered into the fray, there was little hope that the Irish were willing to commit themselves to join the allies. This was exemplified by speeches given by De Valera and the Irish Ambassador to Washington who reiterated their political stance within a week of the American declaration of war.² Nevertheless, Robertson cited that Canadian papers such as the “Montreal Star and the Toronto Mail and Globe (sic)” hoped that the presence of American forces in Britain would apply pressure on Dublin to abandon neutrality.³ Robertson offered no comment to this nor offered any tacit approval of such sentiments. Unlike elements of the media and the conservative party, the King government and particularly external affairs did not anticipate the Irish government to waver from its course.

However, the Canadian government continued to closely monitor the situation in Ireland and took their contact with the Irish government quite seriously. In a routine procedure, the Canadian legation had prepared evacuation plans in the event of an Axis invasion of the island. In spite of how straightforward these evacuation procedures were (not to mention mundane) they did lead to some friction between Canadian and British officials over the need for Canadian contact with the Irish government. Subsequently, this situation came to Robertson’s attention in March 1942 when Kearney notified him of the matter. Kearney relayed to Robertson that the “British representative does not see importance of Canadian contact being maintained after attack is certain or has begun. I propose to be the one who will leave last and would like to remain as long as the British

¹ NAC, RG 25, Vol. 781, File 398, Robertson to Kearney, 12 Jan. 1942.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

representative does.”⁴

Kearney, in turn, asked for Robertson’s instructions which arrived soon after the initial query. In Robertson’s view, the arrangements for any evacuation would be left to Kearney’s judgement. However, Robertson strongly cautioned that “One determining consideration would, of course, be the movement of the Irish government” and that Kearney “would remain with that Government as long as possible and move with it when necessary.”⁵ Still, Robertson was visibly annoyed by the British High Commissioner’s advice. King and many of his senior officials within external affairs, such as Robertson, were overtly suspicious of any British action which discounted Canadian foreign policy. Without realizing it, the British High Commissioner had probably raised Canadian sensitivities by advising the Canadians on how to conduct their affairs, seemingly implying that London knew best.

The only real source of friction was when Irish sensibilities were raised by Canadian domestic actions during 1942. Although Dublin was kept aware of Canadian politics by Hearne, it could be argued that one of the most contentious issues between the two nations was sparked not by Conservative attacks of neutrality but when Dublin took exception towards newly enacted enlistment policies within Canada. The question of conscription within Canada was one that worried King and proved to be an issue of great controversy among French Canadians. Yet, the issue also created a problem amongst Irish residents within Canada and caused concern amongst the Irish government as well. The problem stemmed from the fact that Irish residents within Canada were considered to be British citizens, and as such, potential recruits for the military. The Irish

⁴ NAC, King Papers, Series J1, Vol. 326, Kearney to Robertson, 28 Mar. 1942.

⁵ Ibid, Robertson to Kearney, 2 Apr. 1942.

government was vehemently opposed to this classification and from the spring of 1942 until the spring of 1944 a comedy of errors took place within Canada as both nations attempted to reach a compromise.

The debate revolved around the National Resources Mobilisation Act which was amended in 1942 to remove the restriction against overseas conscription.⁶ Further amendments allowed for mandatory military training and service for male British subjects, born or naturalized in any area of the Commonwealth, who had resided in Canada for a year.⁷ The Canadian government notified the Irish government, as well as the other Commonwealth governments, of the changes to the act. The Irish government did not have any objection to Irishmen living abroad being susceptible for military service however it did take exception to Irishmen being defined as British subjects as they were not classified as such under Irish law. Despite the sentiments of the Irish government, the fact was that under Canadian law, Irish citizens residing within Canada were British subjects.

This issue was not helped by Dublin's misunderstanding of Canadian policy as noted by Fred McEvoy. At the time of the amendment, the conditions that dealt with the status of citizens from Commonwealth nations residing within Canada were being readdressed and clarified. In particular, the government wished to make it clear that any person born or naturalized in the Commonwealth and had resided in Canada for one year was eligible for compulsory military training and service.⁸ The Canadian government wished to clarify phrasing of the law and the proposed changes were sent

⁶ C.P. Stacey, Arms, Men And Governments: The War Policies Of Canada 1939-1945, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer for Canada, 1970), 46.

⁷ John F. Hilliker, ed., Documents on Canadian External Relations, VIV, (Ottawa, 1980), 1098.

⁸ Ibid, 1098-1099.

to Kearney and the other High Commissioners to keep them informed. Kearney was asked by external affairs to ascertain as quickly as possible whether the Irish government had any objection to the planned amendments. He did not have to wait long as the Irish government stressed that "Irish citizens are not British Subjects."⁹ In the meantime, the Irish and the British governments exchanged political niceties on whether or not Irish citizens were indeed British subjects as stated by a British court ruling.

This matter was further complicated as a result of an apparent gaffe made by Kearney in June 1942. In April, Kearney had received a full statement of government plans concerning "conscription of various classes of aliens in Canada."¹⁰ These plans were solely for Kearney's use but soon after, Ottawa received a cable from Kearney stating that the Irish government was reviewing the documents that had been sent in April. Mistakenly, Kearney had given the government plans to Irish officials. Prior to this mistake, the Irish held the view that the King government would consider Irish citizens as neutral aliens and now they voiced their opposition to any law that stated otherwise.

The King government viewed the situation as a headache and there were some officials who were not only displeased with Kearney's mistake but felt that "it would have been better if we had never said anything to the Irish government regarding the proposed changes in our draft law and regarding the proposed changes in our naturalization law."¹¹ The situation remained unsolved and would remain so for nearly another year. As Robertson observed, "Irish nationals are in an anomalous

⁹ NAC, RG 25, File 715-F-2-40, High Commissioner in Ireland to Secretary of State for External Affairs, 31 Mar. 1942.

¹⁰ Hilliker, *op. cit.*, 1099.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 1101.

situation” and there were a number of difficulties to deal with¹²

The King government was perplexed at how to approach the situation as options were limited and this matter could lead to a controversy that would play into the hands of the Conservatives. The government could maintain the status quo and treat Irishmen as British subjects, but that would certainly lead to an uproar in Dublin. Another option was to “treat them as neutral aliens” but this would require both administrative and legal changes that the government regarded as too broad to be initiated.¹³ King was kept aware of the situation but even by August 1943 Canadian officials remained puzzled as to what should be done. In a memo sent by Robertson to King on 13 August Robertson disclosed that “N.R.M.A. regulations presents a number of difficulties.” and he asserted that amending the act “would certainly provoke a very sharp and unpleasant debate in the House of Commons and in the press about the Irish position in the war and status in the Commonwealth.”¹⁴ In Robertson’s view, the best manner in which to resolve the issue was to maintain the status quo:

all things considered, I think the least objectionable course is to apply the law as it now stands, without amendment. This would mean that Irish nationals, ordinarily resident in Canada, would be liable to call up for military service in the same way as other British subjects. Their position in Canada would be substantially the same as it is in the United Kingdom. We would undoubtedly receive representations from the Irish government, which we would have to resist. I think it would be very foolish for the Irish government to try to make an issue out of the question at this time, and I should hope that Mr. Kearney would be able to convince Mr. de Valera that no good purpose would be served by Irish insistence on the ultimate implications of recognition of their neutral status.¹⁵

¹² NAC, RG 25, File 715-F-6-40, Memorandum for Prime Minister, 13 Aug, 1943.

¹³ Fred McEvoy, “Canadian-Irish Relations During the Second World War.” Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 5 2(1977): 212.

¹⁴ Hilliker, op. cit., 1101-1002.

¹⁵ NAC, RG 25, File 715-F-6-40, Memorandum from Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, 13 Aug. 1943.

King concurred with Robertson's assessment of the matter much to the chagrin of Hearne who was vehemently opposed to the current policy.

Hearne fervently protested arguing that the current policy should not apply to Irish residents with Canada. In the meantime, Hearne made it known in official circles that Robertson's proposal would not be acceptable. Indeed, he recommended that "it might be possible" to change the wording of the act to enable the Irish to be seen as citizens of a neutral nation.¹⁶ The King government decided that perhaps a compromise could be arranged and finally a solution was put forth which did not result in the need to change Canadian law or amend the N.R.M.A. regulations. The ensuing compromise stipulated that Irish citizens, provided they could prove their nationality, would be exempted from military service.¹⁷ This resolved a delicate matter, albeit with much exasperation from both governments. The conclusion appealed to both parties and importantly for the King government, it did not lead to a controversy within the House of Commons or in the media.

King remained unwilling to denounce or even imply that Irish neutrality was detrimental to the allied cause as some argued nor did he place some of the horrific allied losses during the Battle of the Atlantic at Ireland's doorstep. In numerous speeches given throughout 1942 King spoke of the tremendous importance of keeping the sea lanes from North-America to Britain and Europe open. Moreover, King also publicly stated that he anticipated a German naval offensive that would cut the sea lanes between North America and Britain.¹⁸ These warnings were accentuated by the fact that

¹⁶ Hilliker, op. cit., 1103.

¹⁷ NAC, RG 25, File 715-F-6-40, Legal Adviser to High Commissioner of Ireland, 24 Mar. 1944.

¹⁸ W.L.M. King, Canada and the Fight for Freedom, (Toronto: MacMillan Canada, 1972), 139.

in November 1942 alone, the Germans sank “over 860,000 tons altogether, including over 720,000 tons sunk by submarines.”¹⁹ Despite these numbers, there was no mention of Ireland by the Liberal government.

Although the Battle of the Atlantic had reached its climax by the end of 1942 the Germans had managed to sink 265,000 tons during the month of May 1943.²⁰ While Whitehall grumbled about the Irish stance and threatened darkly, King chose not to criticise Dublin. In fact it could be argued that he even turned a blind-eye to his own rhetoric and the statistics. By comparison, the conservatives maintained their criticism of the ports issue in Parliament. As evident in the debates, King rebuffed the Conservative criticism.

It was obvious, however, that during and after the conscription episode and ports debate, relations had not been disrupted between the two nations. If anything, the position of the Canadian government continued to grow in stature as the Canadian connection to Ireland proved useful. This was demonstrated by Kearney’s meeting with MacWhite, the Irish Ambassador to Italy, towards the end of July 1942. MacWhite spoke candidly to Kearney of the economic, social and political conditions in Italy, Kearney had reported the conversation to Robertson and also passed on the information he had received to the British and American representatives in Dublin so as to inform their governments.²¹ In Kearney’s opinion, MacWhite’s comments “made a deep impression” on Irish officials as he elaborated on the domination wielded by the Germans. He also keenly observed

¹⁹ Gerhard L. Weinberg, A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 374.

²⁰ Steven Roskill, The Navy at War 1939-1945, (London: Collins Press, 1960), 277.

²¹ NAC, King Papers, Series J4, Vol. 360, Memorandum for the Prime Minister from Robertson, 7 Aug. 1942.

that MacWhite's experiences in Italy were implicit warnings of "what might be expected" in Ireland if the Germans were to launch a successful invasion.²²

Robertson was sufficiently pleased by the report and he remarked to King that "It is quite heartening reading, coming from a neutral and absolutely reliable source."²³ It must be observed from Kearney's memorandum that neither Gray or Maffey were in attendance for this meeting. Perhaps neither were able to attend this function, however, it is plausible that they may not have been invited whereas Kearney had developed a strong rapport with government officials aided by Canadian policy and his own efforts. More to the point though, it was evident that the Canadian legation was also privy to intelligence information along with the British and American legations.

It was also noticeable that by 1943 the King government was looking towards the post-war world and the role that nations would assume. To that end, the King government considered the part that Ireland could play. This constructive approach is noteworthy as there were officials within both the American and British governments who advocated isolating the Irish government for its lack of support of the allies. Reports between Kearney and King towards the end of 1943 indicated that the Canadian government was not prepared to follow a policy whereby Ireland would be isolated in the post-war world.

More specifically, the Canadian government was interested in Ireland accepting refugees from Europe. King had suggested to Kearney that "Ireland might profitably make a humanitarian gesture

²² Ibid, Kearney to Robertson, 22 July, 1942.

²³ Ibid, Memorandum for the Prime Minister from Robertson, 7 Aug. 1942.

of offering to take three to four thousand refugees.”²⁴ In turn Kearney expected to meet with De Valera in the near future and pressed King for further details so as to obtain De Valera’s reaction.

It became clear that King was aspiring to secure goodwill for Ireland on the international stage. King reasoned that both Switzerland and Sweden had “maintained their good reputation with democratic countries” by cooperating in humanitarian acts such as admitting refugees, giving aid to the International Red Cross and through donating funds, services and supplies for relief efforts.²⁵ Any endeavours by Ireland “even at this stage of the war” would enhance Ireland’s standing amongst the world democracies or so King believed.²⁶

King subsequently expanded on these points. He advised that the Irish government should approach the Director of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees with a “generous offer of assistance” not only by donating funds but by also accepting refugees, particularly Jewish refugees, this he asserted was the best immediate step that Dublin could take.²⁷ Such a move would not be difficult as Ireland was already a member of this Intergovernmental Committee. In his own words King stated that:

In general I feel that Ireland which has appealed so often to the sympathy and compassion of other countries and whose interests are profoundly concerned in Allied victory could without any danger to her neutrality show willingness to help as substantially as possible the victims of

²⁴ NAC, King Papers, Series J1, Vol. 342, The High Commissioner For Canada in Ireland to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, 16 Dec. 1943.

²⁵ Ibid, The Secretary of State for External Affairs to the High Commissioner for Canada in Ireland, 28 Dec. 1943.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

German persecution.²⁸

Evidently King was not reluctant to remind Dublin that when their wartime policies were scrutinized, they had in the past sought the goodwill and understanding of the international community. Now here was a chance, in King's mind, for Ireland to return the favour. Manifestly, King wished to see Ireland raise its standing on the world stage, which alone would make it possible for Dublin to play a constructive role in the postwar world and allow Ottawa to maintain a policy of constructive dialogue and candid relations with Ireland.

While there were differences of opinion between the two nations, most notably the drafting of Irish citizens in Canada, it is fair to say that the Canadian government had managed to achieve a solid wartime rapport with Ireland, more so than the American and British governments. The two sides were able to work out their differences and as the MacWhite example demonstrated, Canadian policy had produced a tangible benefit. It was also noticeable that domestic opponents of King's Irish policy had become less vocal. Perhaps they were frustrated at his refusal to admonish Dublin. In any event, the King government maintained a diplomatic policy towards Dublin that it felt was right not only for the nation, but right for respecting the principles of commonwealth autonomy and national unity.

²⁸ Ibid.

Chapter VI: A Moderate Position-Canadian Policy During the Notes D  b  cle

The months leading up to February 1944 were the calm before the storm. In February, Canadian relations with Ireland were put in a precarious situation. A diplomatic donnybrook, generated by the Americans with mixed assistance from the British, placed Canada in an awkward position between its wartime allies and Ireland. What ended up as a seemingly hopeless morass began with an American diplomatic note requesting Dublin to expel the Axis legations from Ireland. The Irish government refused and subsequently looked to Ottawa for support. The Canadian reaction was mixed as there was explicit support for the American request, but behind the scenes the Canadian government was more than displeased with the way its allies had handled the situation. Canadian officials tried to handle the crisis in ways consistent with the well-established practice governing relations with Dublin, in place from 1939 and were not to be moved from this practice while the war was still on.

The genesis of the American note could be traced back to a conversation in February of 1943 involving Gray (the U.S. Ambassador) Maffey and Kearney. It focussed once again upon a possible approach to Dublin for allied use of Irish port and air facilities. Allied preparations for a cross channel invasion were running out of room on the British isles and the Battle of the Atlantic still could profit from allied operations from an Irish base. The three men agreed that an approach should be made. However, both Gray and Kearney had fundamental differences on how to pursue properly such an endeavour.

It must be noted that the leading player in this was Gray who had returned to the United States for a visit and possibly to gauge support for his idea. A brief mention of Gray is essential to further clarify his role in the February d  b  cle and to illustrate the divergence in his methods with those used by Kearney. Ottawa's relationship with Gray began in April 1940 when he first arrived in

Dublin. Apparently, Gray had failed to make much of an impression on either Kelly or Skelton. The latter informed King in a memo describing Gray's activities in Dublin that "Good relations between the North and South of Ireland are of course to be greatly desired, but it seems very doubtful whether Mr. Gray is in the position to advance the cause very much."¹ Skelton characterized Gray as a "former newspaperman, with not much fame" whose major accomplishment was to have married Maude Livingstone Hall, an aunt of Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt.²

The Canadians were not the only ones to have mixed feelings about Gray. In particular, De Valera loathed the American ambassador -the feeling was mutual however. Irish wariness of Gray had been exacerbated by his public remarks which opposed Irish neutrality and his attempts to encourage anti-government bodies politically opposed to De Valera. As noted by the historian Fred McEvoy, Gray's "chief failing as a diplomat was his lack of diplomacy, resulting in his alienating a wide circle of Irishmen."³ By contrast, both Kelly and Kearney had been held in high esteem and this aided the Canadian government in procuring friendly relations with Dublin. The same, however, could not be said for the Americans.

The relationship between Dublin and Washington was to become further strained as Gray reconsidered his earlier idea. He now was prepared to ask Ireland for a further concession, namely the removal of the Axis diplomats. It is more than likely that this proposal was strongly influenced by the preparations for operation Overlord, the D-day landings in Normandy, France. To prepare for

¹ NAC, King Papers, Series J4, Vol. 342, Skelton to King n.d.

² Ibid.

³ Fred McEvoy, "Canadian-Irish Relations During the Second World War" The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth Studies 5 2 (1977): 206-227, 214.

Overlord, the allies had created a phantom army in Britain so as to create the impression that there would be more than one allied landing in Europe. This operation was known as “Fortitude” and for obvious reasons the allies wished to limit German intelligence as much as possible. It was quite likely that the German legation in Dublin was in a position to observe allied preparations and possibly expose the allied deception that was carefully being worked out.

Norman Robertson was notified by Kearney in mid-October that Gray had been pushing the U.S. government to not only request port and air facilities, but to also demand that Axis diplomats be removed from Ireland. In Kearney’s view the intentions of these requests were nothing less than “that Ireland should be asked to declare war on Germany.”⁴ Gray’s revised ideas were prepared in a memorandum that argued how little Germany had done for Ireland in comparison with the United States. In keeping with his confrontational method of dealing with Dublin, Gray condemned the Irish government for ingratitude.⁵ In Kearney’s words, Gray’s memorandum was “almost tantamount to an indictment.”⁶

While this memorandum had yet to be delivered to the Irish government, it was shown to both Roosevelt and Churchill and both men had “expressed some measure of approval.”⁷ Nevertheless, there was a divergence in opinion between the Americans and the British Foreign Office. Maffey in particular was apprehensive towards the content of the memorandum. Kearney, in addition to Maffey, estimated that the majority of the British Cabinet were not overtly anti-Irish, however,

⁴ NAC, RG 25, Vol.781, File 398, Kearney to Robertson, 15 Oct. 1943

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Churchill had a history of enmity against Ireland “which dates back to the failure of the Irish to implement and abide by the 1921 treaty.”⁸ Yet, despite Churchill’s support for Gray’s proposal, Kearney mused that the majority of the British Cabinet shared Maffey’s apprehension. Kearney felt that, no good could come from Gray’s efforts as it was clear that the Irish reaction would be overwhelmingly negative. Moreover, the ramifications of such a move could lead to resentment and destroy any possibility of Irish “benevolence which Ireland had heretofore exhibited.”⁹

Washington soon decided to tone down the rhetoric of the memorandum. Kearney guessed that it had been redrafted in late autumn, possibly by Cordell Hull the Secretary of State, and as a result it had become entirely different from Gray’s original draft. It was much more conciliatory in that the demands for the port and air facilities had now become future requests. Hull’s changes though were opposed by Maffey and Gray who now found the memorandum “weak and ineffectual.”¹⁰ Kearney, however, favoured the toned down version as it was “based on possible war needs, and not on post-war politics.”¹¹ More to the point, it was unlikely to garner the hostile reaction from Dublin that the original draft would have received. In the meantime, it appeared that Hull had explained to Gray and Maffey that Washington felt that the time was not right to approach Dublin and that the pros and cons still had to be assessed. Despite the postponement, Kearney informed Robertson that Roosevelt would in the near future submit a request, similar to the Hull memorandum, to Dublin. Kearney’s assumption that it was unstoppable proved to be correct in that an American note was

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

presented to the Irish government on 21 February, 1944 and was followed by a British note the next day. Thus, it was evident that during the time following Gray's proposal and Hull's amendments, the American government had decided to issue a note along the lines favoured by Gray. This diplomatic note demanded that the Irish expel the Axis diplomatic representatives from Ireland. The Canadians were told that the reason for this, as put forth by the Americans, was the fear of "Axis espionage against allied military operations of vital importance."¹² Ultimately the root of this fear was that Ireland's geographical proximity to Britain combined with the presence of Axis diplomats on Irish soil endangered the allied cause.

It must be noted however that in the middle of 1941, when it became known that the German legation in Dublin was in regular radio contact with Germany, the British had successfully approached Dublin to instruct the German legation that they would no longer be able to use their transmitter.¹³ The Irish request appeared to be effective and the transmitter was silent until February 1942, "when it transmitted what was assumed to be weather reports during the passage of the Scharnhorst and the Gneisenau from Brest through the Channel."¹⁴ This resulted in a reprimand from the Irish government and the German Minister was cautioned that "further use of the transmitter would bring British and American pressure for its surrender and perhaps for the

¹² NAC, King Papers, Series J4, Vol. 283, The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, 23 Feb. 1944.

¹³ F.H. Hinsley and C.A.G. Simkins, British Intelligence in the Second World War: Volume IV Security and Counter-Intelligence, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1990), 195.

¹⁴ Ibid.

expulsion of the legation.”¹⁵ The Germans heeded to the Irish protests and the set remained quiet for the duration of the war. Regardless of these actions and Irish cooperation, it was obvious that the Allies were not convinced that the threat had been removed. Moreover, it is not fully known that Ottawa was even made aware of the Anglo-Irish cooperation.

The Canadian government was not informed until two days after the initial note had been delivered. Only then was King notified by the British Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, that Washington had taken the initiative and that the British government felt it desirable to support Washington’s demands. The British were not confident that the demands would be met and their suspicions were confirmed when De Valera rejected the demands and retorted that the presentation of the note was “part of Allied policy of putting a squeeze on neutrals.”¹⁶

Before King and officials at external affairs came to terms with what had just occurred, they learned from Kearney that he had been approached by De Valera to determine whether the Canadian government would be prepared to “seek to secure the withdrawal of the U.S. note and of the supporting note” presented by the British.¹⁷ Robertson advised King that while the Irish suggestion was “curious” it was not viable in the form presented.¹⁸ Robertson surmised that De Valera’s anger did not stem from the substance of the approach but “from the formality of the approach.” Upon further examination, Robertson was puzzled by the tactics employed by the Americans and guessed

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ NAC, King Papers, Series J4, Vol. 283, The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, 23 Feb. 1944.

¹⁷ NAC, RG 25, File 126(s), Memorandum from Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, 24 Feb. 1944.

¹⁸ Ibid.

that “there may have been some domestic political motive in the United States” that persuaded the Americans to follow through with the note in this form.

Nevertheless, in Robertson’s mind even if the Canadian government felt that it was in a position to help out De Valera this should not be done. It is not clear why Robertson came to this conclusion, more than likely though he realized that it would have been unwise to alienate both of Canada’s closet wartime political and economic allies or it might have been that by now Operation Fortitude had been explained to Canada’s military chiefs.

Both King and Robertson received further details from Kearney of the events from 23 February. In a telegram, Kearney relayed that De Valera felt that the joint American-British was a pretext to a possible invasion of Ireland. Unfortunately it appeared that emotion replaced reason in De Valera’s ability to grasp the situation. De Valera explained to Kearney “that Ireland was prepared to fight invasion from any quarter” even if the outcome against an American and British invasion was a foregone conclusion.¹⁹ Kearney attempted to reason with De Valera and assured him that although he was unaware of the content of the notes, he was misconstruing them. Instead, Kearney suggested that De Valera should keep in mind that the allies were planning an eventual invasion of Western Europe and were simply taking precautions to prevent espionage.²⁰ De Valera then concluded the meeting by informing him of his rejection of the notes and expressed hope that the Canadian government “would show understanding of the situation.”²¹ This request was received

¹⁹ NAC. RG 25, File 398. Vol. 781, High Commissioner in Ireland to Secretary of State for External Affairs (No.13), 25 Feb. 1944.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

with some apprehension as Kearney chose to wait for instructions from home.

Upon meeting with De Valera again the same day, Kearney confirmed Robertson's suspicions that De Valera's anger stemmed from the way the notes had been presented. De Valera argued that if espionage was the cause for concern, then "they would not have departed from the ordinary mode of communication, but would have sought by private negotiations to find additional means to guard against espionage" and he would have been more than willing to cooperate.²² As well, the wording of the American note was another cause of contention, particularly the words "Absolute minimum" which came across as an ultimatum to the Irish. De Valera's hope for a more subtle approach though were probably dashed due to the extent of the control of German diplomats which Overlord planners wanted.

It was during this conversation that De Valera announced his fear of a press campaign that would demonize the Irish government and that Anglo-Irish relations would suffer. He expressed to Kearney that it was in the interests of Ireland and the United Nations if the notes were withdrawn "through intervention of a friendly nation."²³ To that end, De Valera expressed his hope that Canada would assume this function. That De Valera would request this of the King government illustrates the extent in which he not only held Canadians in high regard, but also that he felt diplomatic relations were both sound and congenial.

Kearney did not think it wise for King to seek the withdrawal of the notes but suggested that "you might consider suggesting that they be made secret." Kearney expanded on his suggestion reasoning that "secrecy as opposed to publicity may meet or at least enough of Mr. De Valera's difficulties

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

and on balance, I think, secrecy at this critical time cannot but be more advantageous to Great Britain and the United States than publicity.”²⁴ Kearney argued that even if this failed to please De Valera, it would still show Canadian goodwill towards the Irish. King was cautioned that De Valera was anxiously waiting for a response, and there was obvious tension within the Irish government.

In Ottawa, Robertson was pleased with Kearney’s conduct and prepared to have supporting instructions sent to him. He agreed with Kearney’s appraisal that De Valera had overreacted vis-a-vis a possible allied invasion of Ireland and in Robertson’s view the fears were “groundless” and “grotesque.”²⁵ In a wider context, Robertson noted that the Americans had been applying pressure on all of the remaining neutrals so as to fully isolate the Axis nations. This probably was a function of allied planning for the postwar world when severe measures were planned for Germany and any sympathy or support to the defeated would be anathema to Washington and London, and to say the least, Moscow. Robertson expressed to King that he fully supported Kearney’s view that Canada should not seek the withdrawal of the notes but felt that there was “a good deal of merit” in Kearney’s suggestion that the Americans and the British keep secret the fact that their diplomatic approach towards Dublin had failed.²⁶

The King government was also approached by the British who had learned from Maffey that De Valera had asked Ottawa to have the notes withdrawn. Subsequently, the British High Commission delivered a note to external affairs detailing British policy. Robertson conveyed to King that

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, High Commissioner in Ireland to Secretary of State for External Affairs (No. 12), 25 Feb. 1944.

²⁶ Ibid.

Churchill did not want him to acquiesce to De Valera's request and there was even hope that Canada might associate itself with the joint American and British effort.²⁷ Churchill's message asserted that the security concerns raised by the Americans and the British applied just as much to Canadian forces whose lives would also be at risk if German intelligence was left a free field in Ireland. This message suggested, somewhat nonchalantly, that it would be wrong for Ottawa to become involved with De Valera's request.

However, the British had annoyed Robertson and other high ranking officials at external affairs, most notably, Hume Wrong. Robertson was direct with the British High Commission, stating that the "Canadian government had not been consulted about this new approach to the Irish Government, and had only been informed of it after it had taken place."²⁸ Moreover, he warned the British, that given the circumstances, "I thought it extremely unlikely that the Canadian government would be prepared to consider associating itself, formally and belatedly, in the way Mr. Churchill had suggested."²⁹ This was not meant to suggest that the Canadian government did not sympathize with the allied request, as it did, just that the King government did not agree with the measures taken by its allies. As noted by Robertson, the Canadians had not even seen the notes but were of the impression that they did not "give Mr. De Valera a plausible public occasion for modifying his policy."³⁰ In short, Robertson considered the Anglo-American venture to be mistaken but at the

²⁷ NAC, King Papers, Series J4, Memorandum for Prime Minister from Robertson, 25 Feb. 1944.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

same time he did not believe that Canada could act as an intermediary.

It was evident that the policies of the King government placed Canada in the middle, it was not surprising then that De Valera requested the King government to play the role of intermediary. Yet, King failed to fully share De Valera's assessment. In a telegram to Kearney, King stated that "We have a good deal of sympathy with Mr. de Valera's objections to the form and timing of the United States-United Kingdom approach" but King was of the view that De Valera should consider the request.³¹ Later on that day, however, it appeared that King and Robertson concluded that Dublin would not consent to the notes. To that end, it was hoped that the involved parties would reach the conclusion favoured by Ottawa, namely that any publicity should be squelched and the involved parties work out their differences privately. It was also brought to Kearney's attention once again that the British had failed to advise Ottawa of the notes. From his talks with Maffey, Kearney was of the impression, mistakenly, that London had indeed notified Ottawa about the notes.³² It was evident that Ottawa was not at all pleased about being kept in the dark. Indeed, it is unclear whether Fortitude, as the possibly governing issue, had ever been explained to Canadian diplomats, while it had been explained to Stalin, though probably in his capacity as generalissimo, rather than as head of government.

The situation did not quickly disappear and Hearne requested a meeting with King, who received him on 27 February. King's record of the meeting was thoroughly detailed in his diary and it appeared from King's recollection of their conversation that:

³¹ NAC, RG 25, File 126(s), Secretary of State for External Affairs to High Commissioner in Ireland (No.4), 25 Feb. 1944.

³² Ibid, File 398. Vol. 781. Secretary of State for External Affairs Ottawa to High Commissioner in Ireland (No. 5), 25 Feb. 1944.

Hearne began to outline the little thanks which the Irish had received for what they had done and were seeking to do by way of co-operation in the war, and went over at length the grounds which gave rise to their suspicion of Britain. He inferred that what was commonly a note from the U.S. in reality was something which had been inspired by the U.K.³³

King took exception to this and stated accurately that the note had been generated by the Americans with a request for British support. King's impression was that Hearne fully believed that there were ulterior motives behind the Anglo-American note to which the Irish would not acquiesce to.

King assured Hearne that his suppositions were false and that if De Valera held similar views, he was mistaken as well. In King's words De Valera "was quite wrong in believing that there was any objective in the notes other than what appeared on the face of them."³⁴ King felt that the delivery of the note was poorly handled but he concluded that it was done with the intent of protecting allied wartime interests. When pressed by King as to what the ramifications would be if Ireland refused to expel the Axis diplomats King was unsure or evasive but was quick to point out that "there was a long future ahead of all of us after the war was over and that any and every step in the way of co-operation now would be remembered."³⁵ Hearne was told throughout the conversation that there were no plans to invade Ireland or other ulterior motives, in the hope of reassuring the Irish government. Canada, though, would welcome any co-operation by the Irish government but would not condemn Dublin if it chose to ignore the note.

King was also explicit in telling Hearne that he wished to be kept abreast of further developments but did not wish to intervene in a matter that lay between Dublin, Washington and London. That

³³ NAC, King Papers, Diary, 27 Feb. 1944.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

King chose not to act as an intermediary is probably due to his inability to see any gains to be made. If there were gains to be made, without risk, then King would have more than likely intervened in the matter as he had during the Irish conscription crisis. It was apparent though that King put greater emphasis on his relationship between Washington and London within the North Atlantic Triangle relationship than over his role as lynch-pin between Dublin and London.

Clearly the King government and particularly external affairs had decided to adopt a moderate position in comparison to the Americans and the British. Ottawa did not object to the removal of the Axis missions but it was evident that it disagreed with the delivery and the wording of the aforementioned notes. Indeed, De Valera was assuaged through his conversations with Kearney and by King's conversation with Hearne. De Valera was also pleased with King's position and as Kearney reported "appreciated your difficulty of intervening and was grateful for your remarks regarding publicity."³⁶ Viewing the Canadians as moderates, Maffey approached Kearney to act in a "lighting rod-role (sic)" due to the fact that relations between De Valera and Gray were precarious at best. Maffey fully agreed with Kearney that publicity should not be given to the matter.³⁷

On 2 March, Kearney reported to Ottawa that De Valera had received reassurances from Washington that there were no sanctions attached to the note and Gray informed De Valera that the Americans did not wish to see the note receive publicity,³⁸ thus indicating further approval for the

³⁶ NAC, RG 25, File 126(s), High Commissioner in Ireland to Secretary of State for External Affairs (No. 14), 28 Feb. 1944.

³⁷ NAC, MG 30, E 215, Kearney Diaries, Vol. 1, 27 Feb. 1944.

³⁸ NAC, RG 25, File 398, Vol. 781, High Commissioner in Ireland to Secretary of State for External Affairs (No. 18), 2 Mar. 1944.

Canadian position. The result of this was that there was a brief lull in the diplomatic squabbling between the involved parties. King himself was desirous for a pause, as exemplified in a telegram sent to Kearney, stating that "I think our efforts can usefully stop at this point in the hope that the second thoughts of the three Governments originally concerned will help them to reach a satisfactory solution of their respective difficulties."³⁹

However the lull was short lived as the Irish formally replied to the American note. The Irish response, as expected, was negative. What caused the situation to escalate, was that the exchange of notes was leaked to the media. Moreover, the Irish request for Canadian intervention was also made public much to the chagrin of King and officials at external affairs. The reason for their displeasure was that the issue was seized upon by the gleeful Conservatives in the House of Commons.

When the debate over the notes and their request for the expulsion of the Axis diplomats began, King told the House of Commons that De Valera had indeed asked for him to mediate in the crisis. King appeared to downplay this fact by stating that "such representatives as were received were in the nature of informal confidential conversations."⁴⁰ That he chose to downplay this was not surprising as news of the notes had unleashed an anti-Irish campaign in both Britain and the United States. King, however, was not prepared to forsake the Irish as was indicated by his displeasure with a draft statement prepared by Robertson which was to be read to the House of Commons. King felt that the proposed draft was quite scathing and the eventual product was amended heavily by him.

³⁹ NAC, King Papers, Series J1, Vol. 362, The Secretary of State for External Affairs to the High Commissioner for Canada in Ireland (no. 7), 4 Mar. 1944.

⁴⁰ Hansard, House of Commons Debates, 1944 Session, Vol. II. 1405.

In fact King was so taken aback that he detailed the matter in his diary:

I had still to prepare a statement regarding the Irish situation. Had relied on E.A. for this. Robertson gave me a statement which, however, in many particulars was quite different to what I would have prepared myself if there would have been time. It seemed to be hardly fair to the Irish method of approach to us and their purpose, as I would have wished to have it. I did cut out from the External Affairs statement some parts that I think would really hurt De Valera and Hearne and which were not needed at this time.⁴¹

King was specifically referring, as noted by Fred McEvoy, to the last sentence of the original statement which read:

The Canadian Government has, moreover, long entertained the earnest hope that the Irish Government and people would come to share our conviction that the permanent interests of Ireland are identified with the victory of the United Nations, and would make of their own motion a direct contribution to the defeat of the Axis powers.⁴²

It is notable that King chose to amend this last sentence. Such a move was in keeping with the moderate policy that he had followed along with Ireland since September 1939.

Although King was wary of using bellicose tones, the same considerations did not apply to the British. On 13 March, the British government enacted travel restrictions between Britain and Ireland and stated that these restrictions were purely due to military reasons. It had become evident, though, that Churchill was infuriated with the Irish government and had recently delivered a fierce speech directed at Irish neutrality. Still, it must be borne in mind that the protection of Operation Fortitude might explain Churchill's display of temper.

The Canadians were taken aback by the travel restrictions and were perplexed as to whether or not the British were imposing sanctions against Ireland. Although this was not the case, it was understandable that the Canadians were caught off guard by the news of travel restrictions. Once

⁴¹ NAC, King Papers, Diary, 13 Mar. 1944.

⁴² Ibid, King Papers, Series J4, Vol. 283, c194489, 13 Mar. 1944.

again London had failed to notify Ottawa, much to the chagrin of King and Robertson. Moreover, the issue was also related to the matter of Commonwealth relations as Ottawa still considered Ireland to be a member of the Commonwealth and objected to any possible desire of the British to independently expel Ireland. Robertson had been visibly annoyed by the British failure to consult Ottawa and in a memorandum to King he appraised the situation as follows:

As a matter of fact Eire is still a member of the British Commonwealth and presumably it can leave the Commonwealth if it chooses to do so just as it has been free to remain neutral if it wished to do so. It cannot, however, be expelled from the Commonwealth by the United Kingdom acting alone any more than India could be admitted to the Commonwealth by the United Kingdom acting alone and without consultation with the other members of the Commonwealth.⁴³

This statement may be taken as the epitome of Canada's position towards Ireland during the war, namely that it was for the Irish to decide their own course. In addition, the King government had a long history of being exasperated by unilateral British actions on matters that affected the entire Commonwealth community. Robertson even offered to King that "My own feeling is that we would be justified in protesting pretty sharply to the United Kingdom" not only because of their failure to communicate but also because of "the unwisdom in the common interest of the action that had actually been taken."⁴⁴ King with the support of his Cabinet agreed to Robertson's opinion and notified the British of their displeasure. Hence British actions not only alienated the Canadian government but also garnered the Irish a certain degree of sympathy from Ottawa.

Although the British tried to allay the temper of the King government, it failed to do so completely. London attempted to explain that the travel restrictions were meant to prevent any form

⁴³ NAC, RG 25, File 398, Vol. 781 Memorandum from the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, 15 Mar. 1944.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

of espionage and that the idea had been under consideration for sometime but admitted that the timing proved to be poor.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the Canadian position was curtly defined in a telegram sent to not only the British but to the Governments of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa thereby indicating the degree of Canadian frustration towards British Commonwealth diplomacy.

The note declared that:

In general it seems to us that the recent developments concerning Ireland are matters of high concern to all the members of the Commonwealth. We were not consulted in advance of the attempt to secure the removal of Axis representatives nor were we informed of your intentions respecting travel restrictions. We note that these restrictions were described by Mr. Churchill in the House of Commons on March 14th as 'the step in a policy designed to isolate Great Britain from Southern Ireland' during the critical period. If later steps are limited to actions necessary to prevent leakage of military information the Irish Government should have no reasonable cause for complaint as long as fear of ulterior political motives is not present in their minds.

This fear, however, undoubtedly prevails and what is done now may affect the position of Ireland in relation to the rest of the Commonwealth for many years to come. If Ireland is moved to leave the Commonwealth that is a matter of serious moment to us. We assume that you agree that no question of the expulsion of Ireland from the Commonwealth can arise except as the result of a decision reached by all the Commonwealth Governments.

We wish therefore to emphasize that we are concerned over the position that has arisen. We have felt from the first that the approach looking to the removal of the Axis representatives was not made in the form best designed to achieve its object, but we at once did what we could to persuade the Irish Government to comply. We have also publicly supported the action taken. We hope that there will be full consultation before any further steps are taken which are likely to have repercussions on the position of Ireland in the Commonwealth.⁴⁶

The telegram was strongly supported by high ranking officials within external affairs who applauded the delivery of it to London. Lester B. Pearson, posted in Washington at the time cabled Robertson to congratulate him on the message on Ireland stating that "I think it is exactly what was needed."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ McEvoy, 219.

⁴⁶ NAC, RG 25, File 126(S) Secretary of State for External Affairs to Dominions Secretary (No.43), 20 Mar. 1944.

⁴⁷ Ibid, RG 25, File 398, Vol. 781 Pearson to Robertson, 22 Mar. 1944.

The tension from the notes affair eventually dissipated. But the end result was that Irish public and political opinion remained visibly alienated from the allied cause and the resentment felt in Ottawa towards London was palpable. The King government had been unequivocal in its support for the objective of the notes but it was visibly annoyed at the fact that once again it appeared as though Canadian support was automatically assumed. Moreover, it appeared as though a matter relevant to the Commonwealth had been unilaterally decided by London. That the British move appeared to smack of Commonwealth centralization was a sore-point which had habitually incurred the wrath of King.

Nonetheless, the Canadian government had played an immensely vital role as it espoused moderation and had soothed a rather distraught De Valera. The wisdom of the Canadian recommendation for secrecy was exemplified in the wake of the political and public uproar generated by the leak of the notes to the press. The Canadian role garnered praise from all sides, particularly the Americans who were “grateful for the efforts of Kearney.”⁴⁸ Dublin was also appreciative. What must ultimately be recognized, is that although Ottawa essentially agreed with the Anglo-American objective the King government had maintained a separate policy towards Dublin. It was a policy though that was guided by the principles of moderation, Commonwealth autonomy, and Canadian self-interest.

⁴⁸ McEvoy, 221.

Chapter VII: A Policy Fulfilled

The expulsion proposals débâcle of February 1944 marked the last controversial affair between Canadian-Irish diplomatic relations during the Second World War. The foundations for strong relations had been laid during this time and the period between the notes débâcle and the collapse of Germany could be seen as a period of transition marked by a surprising degree of mutual understanding. It was a period of transition during which Ottawa pondered the relationship that Ireland would have with the post-war Commonwealth and world. Economic growth, in particular, was reflected in the increase of trade between the two nations. Without much fanfare trade had continued to develop and grow during the war. This would have been hard to imagine had not relations between Ottawa and Dublin been based on a substantial quotient of mutual understanding. Ottawa and Dublin had weathered a diplomatic storm between September 1939 to March 1944. The period thereafter demonstrated the extent to which relations between the two nations had evolved despite less than positive circumstances.

During this period, the King government carefully considered the position that Ireland would have when the war had ended. In this era, the growing power of the Soviet Union and the hostility of Catholic Ireland to it played no small role. In a memo to King, Robertson disclosed some post-war views held by Irish officials, namely that the Irish “would be prepared” to “link Ireland by military alliance and commercial agreement more intimately with Great Britain than with any other nation.” This would be done so as to oppose “the dominant position of Russia.”¹ Indeed, Robertson hypothesized that the Irish might be “willing to ally herself closely with a Commonwealth- United

¹ NAC, King Papers, Series J1, Vol. 362, Memorandum for Prime Minister from Robertson, 16 Feb. 1944.

States bloc as a bulwark against Soviet power.”² This was anticipating the future by quite a bit but clearly new factors were at play.

Old frictions, however, also continued to play a part almost as prominently as crystal gazing into the future did. For example, Irish ambivalence towards the Commonwealth prevented an Irish delegation from being invited to a meeting of officials of Commonwealth and Empire Governments in Montreal on 23 October, 1944. Initially the Canadians wanted to invite Ireland to take part in the talks in Montreal that were meant to discuss “operational and technical problems connected with the establishment of air routes between countries of the British Commonwealth.”³ The British, however, objected to an Irish presence at the meeting on the grounds that:

It would be impossible for us to advocate an Empire Conference at which a Member State of the British Empire was present who actually at that moment would be maintaining in Dublin German and Japanese diplomatic representatives and Irish representatives at Berlin and Tokyo. The magnitude of the question of the future relations of Ireland with the British Empire and Commonwealth and with the United Kingdom is by no means to be overlooked, but it should not be settled on a side issue if this character, where our hand has been forced by the action of a foreign power. Although Anglo-Irish relations are a matter of concern to the whole Empire, it will, I am sure, be admitted that the interest of the United Kingdom on account of our very close proximity, is one which must be considered paramount.⁴

So as not to upset the Irish, King instructed Kearney that it was important under the circumstances that “no constitutional or political importance should be attached to the absence of Ireland from the

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, The Secretary of State for External Affairs to the High Commissioner for Canada in Ireland (No.31), 4 Oct. 1944.

⁴ John Hilliker, ed., Documents on Canadian External Relations, Vol. 11, Part II (Ottawa, 1990), 409.

meeting in Canada.”⁵ Indeed, King even prepared what he described as “an easy explanation” for the Irish to present for their exclusion from the meetings, namely that there would be discussion of military air services during the duration of the war.⁶ As well, King contacted Churchill to inform him of this suggestion, stating that provided there would be a discussion of wartime air service at the conference and that this would be made public, the Irish invitation would be omitted.⁷ Such a move lessened the risk that Dublin would blame Ottawa in the event that they felt snubbed. That King chose to do this illustrates his desire to avoid offending the Irish-Commonwealth relationship and it appears as though King’s efforts assuaged the Irish. Canadian officials though, particularly Escott Reid, were made aware by officials within the British Dominions Office that there “was a policy of excluding the Irish from the Commonwealth councils” forced upon the British Cabinet by Churchill.⁸ If Churchill was thinking of obtaining Irish support against the Soviet Union he gave no indication of doing so. If Irish politicians thought this would easily pave their way back into Commonwealth circles they were to be disappointed as Churchill in late 1944 and early 1945 was being most respectful and openly trusting of Moscow.

It appeared that even Irish officials were not entirely sure of what Ireland’s position would be in the post-war Commonwealth. It was known that De Valera had fully opposed the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921 which partitioned Ireland and led to the establishment of the Irish-Free State. At the

⁵ NAC, King Papers, Series J1, Vol. 362, The Secretary of State for External Affairs to the High Commissioner for Canada in Ireland (No.31), 4 Oct. 1944.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, The Secretary of State for External Affairs to the Secretary of State for dominion Affairs (No. 195), 3 Oct. 1944.

⁸ Hilliker, op. cit., 444-445.

time the treaty was signed, De Valera had espoused the concept of ‘external association’ only to have his colleagues reject the idea. External association would have allowed Ireland to associate with the Commonwealth in external affairs and would “guarantee her neutrality in wartime.”⁹ Supplementing this, Irish and British citizens would enjoy mutual, as opposed to common, citizenship. For De Valera this would have avoided the “humiliations of the direct imperial link.”¹⁰ Remarkably, De Valera made considerable progress on his agenda by the end of the war. For instance, Ireland had established external relations, not only with members of the Commonwealth but with non-members as well. The option of neutrality had been fully asserted, and Irish citizens, as demonstrated by the N.R.M.A. incident in Canada, were distinct from British citizens.

These changes though had not led to any negative ramifications with Ireland’s bilateral relations with Canada. The Canadians wished to maintain an Irish presence in the Commonwealth but were unsure of how such a presence would be defined. It was apparent to Ottawa that De Valera wanted Ireland to be both a fully independent nation but at the same time he wanted to have some form of external association with the Commonwealth, presaging what India requested and received some years later. In this, De Valera was going ahead somewhat faster than Ottawa was prepared to countenance, but at the same time, Ottawa was very conscious that at previous Imperial Conferences the Irish had been firm supporters of Canadian endeavours against Imperial centralisation and as such it was expected that Irish support would be beneficial in future debates. It would not do to pour

⁹ J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 48.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

too much cold water on Dublin's brainstorming, and the record shows much tact on Ottawa's part.

If the future of Ireland's role in the Commonwealth was unsure, still, it was evident that Canada's bilateral relations with Ireland were expanding in other facets, namely in economic growth. Throughout the war the Canadian government had a Trade Commissioner in Dublin, affiliated with the Canadian legation. As early as 1942, the King government had instructed the Canadian Trade Commissioner, E.L. McColl to tour Western Ireland so as to gather information that would assist in the development of post-war trade between the two nations. That McColl was instructed to do this in 1942 is further evidence that the King government was not alienated by Irish neutrality. After all, trade could often be employed as a possible diplomatic weapon that could be used between nations. The fact that the King government did not attempt to divert trade or impose wartime restrictions on trade with Ireland is significant. Moreover, McColl commented that "Canada could offer a tremendous buying market for Irish products" thereby demonstrating that Ottawa was willing to increase its trade ties with Ireland.¹¹

Furthermore, Kearney suggested to King that Canada should extend "long-term credits to Ireland for the purchase of Canadian goods direct, and not through Great Britain as an intermediary."¹² The reasoning behind this was that "by development and concentration on sending exports to the non-sterling areas, Ireland might in time be able to acquire sufficient exchanges to repay in Canadian dollars" the advances given by Ottawa during the war.¹³ The reasons were not entirely altruistic, the King government wanted to ensure that trade levels did not decrease but it is also true that helping

¹¹ Irish National Archives, DFA, File 348/10, The Connacht Tribune, 14 Feb. 1942.

¹² Hilliker, op. cit., 1381.

¹³ Ibid.

Ireland in difficult times was an explicit objective.

At the same time, Ottawa had a legitimate right to express concern about the Irish post-war economy. Canadian exports to Ireland had risen throughout the war and Irish trade figures, released in February 1945, showed that they had grown from 1,461,000 pounds in 1939 to 5,017,000 pounds by 1944 making Canada the second largest exporter to Ireland behind Britain.¹⁴ Here was hard evidence that neutrality had not impeded economic growth between the two nations.

When the war in Europe came ended on 7 May 1945, the issue of Irish neutrality came to a close. The King government surely felt some relief and although Churchill remained bitter towards Dublin, it was not long before he was voted out of office.

The balance sheet of wartime relations was thus quite mixed. The Canadian government had pursued a policy with Ireland that was often at odds with allied hopes. Though the King Liberals would have applauded Irish entry into the war, King and officials like Skelton and Robertson were prepared to concede, indeed, seemed to believe very firmly, that it was a matter for the Irish to decide. This tolerance that bordered on encouragement, of course, stemmed from the Canadian attitudes concerning autonomy and, to a great extent, national unity. It was a moderate policy in comparison to Canada's Anglo-American allies and it was unmistakably clear that the Canadian government had pursued an independent diplomatic policy with Ireland.

In turn, the Canadians were aware that their wartime policies had garnered praise from the Irish. The fact that Canada was the only dominion that exchanged full diplomatic representation with Ireland did not pass unnoticed. Kearney had received warm praise and *The Irish Times* described him as "one of the most popular, as well as the one of the ablest, members of the diplomatic

¹⁴ Irish National Archives. DFA, File 348/10. Daily Mail (Irish Edition) 9 Feb. 1945.

corps.”¹⁵ The Irish government believed that they had a Commonwealth ally in Canada and as such, regarded Canada as a nation that was always supportive of constitutional progress within the Commonwealth.

With the outbreak of war in September 1939 there had not been a pressing need for Ottawa to expand its relations with Ireland. Indeed the Irish had more to gain than Canada did. The King Liberals were fully aware that Ireland would opt for neutrality yet they did not object or threaten to end relations with what was seen by many as a rogue Commonwealth state. The Canadians, more than any other senior Commonwealth nation could to a certain extent, understand Dublin’s position. What then, in summation, provoked MacKenzie King and many of his senior officials at external affairs to pursue a course of friendly relations with Ireland between 1939 to 1945?. The answer is that there were numerous issues that sculpted bilateral relations between the two nations.

First of all, King and other important officials such as Skelton and Christie had pondered autarky for Canada as did many newspaper editorials throughout the late 1930’s. Neutrality was an option overwhelmingly supported in Quebec. While never a threat to the government, neutrality received limited support from elements within the Canadian populace such as Irish-Canadian Catholics, intellectuals, Church groups and within the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. Indeed, Canadian attitudes toward neutrality had led to concerns amongst some British officials in the period leading up to 1939, though it was a foregone conclusion that Canada would be at Britain’s side even if Canadian officials had been exposed to the concept of neutrality and were not at all alien to it.

More to the point, the Prime Minister and senior officials like Skelton, Christie, Pearson, and

¹⁵ NAC, King Papers, Series J1, Vol 362. *The Irish Times*, 14 Jul. 1944.

Robertson were adamant that any Canadian foreign policy decision must be made by Ottawa, not London. King had argued for this principle as far back as 1922 with the Chanak crisis and maintained throughout the months leading up to the war that Parliament would decide. Ottawa would ultimately side with Britain, but it would be for Ottawa to announce, not Westminster. The King government had on numerous occasions throughout the war asserted Canadian interests as the BCATP arrangement demonstrated. This principle of asserting diplomatic autonomy was another issue on which the Canadian government could not openly criticise Dublin. To do so would have been hypocritical. Canadian consistency and forthrightness was appreciated. Indeed before the outbreak of the war, De Valera had openly stated that he saw Canadian policy as an example for his government to follow.

Not only was the principle of Commonwealth autonomy a factor, but so was national unity. King was worried of leading a divided nation into the war and the possibility of facing a conscription crisis was equally disturbing to him. Both Kelly and Kearney had relayed to Ottawa that Ireland would be torn asunder if Dublin was to announce that it would become a belligerent. This assessment did not change throughout the war and King warily followed the conscription debate in Northern Ireland. He even went so far as to quietly intervene in the matter as demonstrated by the note he sent to Churchill. King had openly enunciated his desire to maintain national unity and surely he could not judge against De Valera for wanting the same. That he did this was indicative of his fear of facing any possible spillover effects within Canada.

These factors formulated Canadian policy towards Ireland and resulted in a moderate policy in comparison to Canada's wartime allies and Commonwealth nations such as New Zealand and Australia. It was apparent that King felt this policy was proper and wished to see bi-lateral relations

develop accordingly. This is exemplified not only in his good relations with Hearne but in his selection of High Commissioners, neither of whom were against King's position. It was apparent that by refusing to appoint Robert Manion as a replacement for Kelly, King did not want to jeopardize his policy. Also, the maintenance of a Trade Commissioner in Dublin throughout the war was of considerable significance both economically and politically. King's policy was largely supported by Skelton and Robertson, neither of whom objected to relations with Ireland during the low points of the war such as the ports debate and the notes débâcle.

Had King really condemned Irish neutrality or if he had perceived it as a genuine threat towards Canada's war effort, then he had numerous opportunities to register his conviction simply by repealing the posting of the Canadian legation in Dublin. The consistent refusal by Dublin to allow the allies use of Irish port and air facilities gave the King government an opportunity whereby Ottawa could have shown its displeasure by condemning Irish neutrality. After all, the use of the Irish ports could well have prevented thousands upon thousands of Canadian deaths, not to mention allied deaths, in the icy North Atlantic waters. In addition to this, the possible security threat posed by the Axis legation furnished still another occasion for severity towards Dublin, but it too was passed by. Through the turmoil of war, Irish-Canadian relations were kept on an even keel, and this in turn reflected on Ottawa's ability in avoiding being stampeded by either London or Washington or even by a combination of both. Through all of this it became evident that there was a quiet strength to Canadian diplomacy.

The fact that King's policy was largely supported within his government and by his advisors also made it easier for him to dismiss criticism from the Conservatives in the House of Commons. King consistently refused to submit to Conservative demands that requested a condemnation of Irish

neutrality or rebuffed critiques that questioned the need for bilateral relations with Dublin. Even the explosive nature of the ports debate in House of Commons had been skilfully managed and ultimately diffused by King.

That King expressed regret in thus furthering bilateral relations with Ireland is not detectable. On the contrary, the evidence indicates that King regarded his policy towards Ireland as establishing fruitful and long-term relations. This is illustrated not only in his desire to see Ireland play a role in post-war humanitarian issues but in his attempts to secure economic growth between Ottawa and Dublin. Despite London's apparent wish to ostracize Dublin, King and external affairs made efforts to maintain an Irish presence within the Commonwealth, a presence that had benefited Canada in previous Commonwealth Conferences and might do so in the future.

King's foreign policy towards Ireland was largely influenced by his own foreign policy towards Britain. The principles of Commonwealth autonomy and national unity were explicit but so was the long-standing antipathy towards London when it acted unilaterally on issues that concerned the Commonwealth as a whole. This was noticeable during the proposed expulsion matter when the British announced their imposition of travel restriction on Ireland. Indeed, it seems reasonable to conclude that King further exercised Canadian autonomy by fostering relations with Ireland, particularly when Canadian policy was convincingly different than that espoused by London. It is the combination of these elements, respect for other Commonwealth nations, revulsion at London's strong arm methods, that sculpted Canadian foreign policy towards Ireland between 1939-1945. A policy that was not only moderate, but recognizably different from Canada's wartime allies. A growing trade both lubricated Irish Canadian understanding and helped underwrite Ottawa's independent course. This chapter in Canadian external relations demonstrates, once again, if that

were needed, that Ottawa's professional diplomats knew how to conduct an independent policy quietly and unobtrusively but effectively. There are many worse models for the foreign policy of a middle power, which by 1945 was Canada's well-earned ambition.

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