

**From Moderates to Mythmakers:
Postwar Foreign Policy in Canadian Federal Elections
1949-1957**

Mt kūr j gt 'Mk pki gt

The popular narrative of a Canadian diplomatic golden age is one still evoked by politicians and pundits alike. Such a narrative recalls an era following the end of the Second World War when the country established itself as a helpful presence on the world stage, where, free of the confines of British imperialism, Canadian politicians and diplomats offered constructive foreign policies that fostered multilateral dialogue and promoted global peace.¹ Or so the narrative goes. However, as numerous historians have argued, Canadian foreign policy in the postwar era, rather than punching above its weight, was continually beset by the need to defer to the policies of Canada's North Atlantic allies, in particular that of the United States and Great Britain.² In keeping with this theme, this paper focuses on the evolving role of foreign policy in the rhetoric of the Liberal Party, the Progressive Conservative Party and (to a lesser extent) the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in the three federal elections held between 1949 and 1957. This analysis confirms the general unimportance of foreign policy in public discourse during this period, as well as the relative lack of golden age imagery in partisan debate. Given their similarities with regard to policy and their proximity to major international events, the majority of this paper's content will focus on the 1949 and 1953 elections, concluding with a brief summary of foreign policy in the 1957 election.

The 1949 election can be viewed as a turning point in the history of Canadian federal politics. Both major parties had elected new leaders the autumn before the election was called, and, in spite of the fact that opinion polls gave the Liberals a sizable lead, by the start of the campaign political staffers were viewing the outcome as being far from certain.³ In October of 1948 the Progressive Conservative Party selected Ontario premier George Drew as the leader that would carry their banner into the next election after a disastrous showing under John Bracken in 1945. Drew was, by all accounts, a formidable political veteran who had garnered a

reputation while premier as a fierce advocate for provincial autonomy, a trait the Tories hoped would help them to win over voters in the key constituencies of Ontario and Quebec.⁴ In some respects, after thirteen uninterrupted years in power the Liberals faced a much more daunting task in choosing who would take up the mantle of William Lyon Mackenzie King, their leader for nearly three decades and the longest-serving prime minister since Confederation. Mackenzie King had announced in January of 1948 his intention to step down by the end of the year, but only after he had become convinced that secretary of state for external affairs Louis St. Laurent would seek the Liberal leadership. Mackenzie King did everything short of an official endorsement to ensure that he clinched the leadership at the party's August convention, persuading six other prominent Liberals to put their names forward as candidates only to later withdraw and throw their support behind St. Laurent (thereby helping to foster an appearance of partisan unity and consensus.)

Despite the fact that he handily claimed the Liberal leadership on the first ballot (with almost seventy percent support,) St. Laurent had appeared indifferent throughout the race as to whether or not he succeeded Mackenzie King as leader and, consequently, prime minister.⁵ During the convention he neither made a direct appeal for support (despite a new change in the convention rules that would have allowed him to do so) nor came out in favour of any radical new policies, instead sponsoring a relatively conservative resolution in support of national unity.⁶ This cautious approach toward campaigning and policy underscored the degree to which St. Laurent's political disposition was influenced and shaped by his predecessor, Mackenzie King, and would come to define the Liberal's platform and foreign policy during the new prime minister's first election as leader the following year.

One could be forgiven if they thought in the months leading up to the June 1949 election that foreign policy would play a significant role in partisan debate. Before St. Laurent had won the Liberal leadership the negotiations for the North Atlantic Treaty were well underway, and Canada, with its strategic territory in the arctic circle, was set to become an important member of the alliance. Next to finalizing the entrance of Newfoundland into Confederation, St. Laurent's top priority when he was sworn in as prime minister in November of 1948 was to complete the negotiations for NATO smoothly and with as little opposition as possible.⁷ With his critics already predicting the Liberals' imminent demise, the prime minister adopted a strategy heading into the 1949 campaign that sought to minimize any public dissatisfaction with the status quo while fostering a positive consensus around the government's record and accomplishments. Although St. Laurent was eager to give his new government the stamp of democratic legitimacy, he was equally determined to solidify the Liberals' accomplishments by ratifying the North Atlantic Treaty negotiations in parliament before calling an election.

The Liberals (while still under the leadership of Mackenzie King) had recognized the potential pitfalls of a global multilateral organization with "nominal equality" amongst its members even before the United Nations had been founded.⁸ The failure of the League of Nations to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War was still fresh in the minds of Canadian politicians and diplomats; at the General Assembly in October of 1946, St. Laurent (then chair of the Canadian UN delegation) had bluntly voiced his government's misgivings about the ability of the Security Council to adequately respond to new threats.⁹ For their part, Canadians in the late 1940s were less than enthused with the progress the UN had made since its founding in 1945, with an attitude that can generally be described as one of indifference. In a Gallup poll conducted in May of 1949, only 34% of respondents indicated that they were

satisfied with the progress the UN had made up until that point, with 22.6% claiming they were dissatisfied and 43.4% claiming they were not familiar enough with the work of the UN to answer the question. Of those who claimed they were satisfied with the UN, only 15.9% chose the prevention of war as being the reason for their satisfaction, with an overwhelming 63.6% selecting the rather meager justification that the UN was doing the best that it could do given the circumstances.¹⁰

Against this backdrop of public indifference toward international affairs, St. Laurent saw an opportunity for his Liberal government to build a consensus around a new international security organization equipped with the resources necessary to respond to the emerging threats of the Cold War. On Remembrance Day in 1948 (four days before taking office as prime minister,) St. Laurent warned Canadians of the danger posed by Communist and totalitarian regimes, highlighting the protection that the Treaty would afford Canadians in an increasingly volatile world: “The alliance must be a sign that the North Atlantic nations are bound together not merely by their common opposition to totalitarian Communism but also by a common belief in the values and virtues of our Western civilization, and by a determination to work for the promotion of mutual welfare and the preservation of peace.”¹¹ Likening the treaty to home insurance, St. Laurent launched a direct appeal to Canadians to support the North Atlantic Treaty, famously concluding his address by stating that “I am simply asking you to pay an insurance premium which will be far less costly than the losses we would face if a new conflagration devastated the world.”¹² St. Laurent’s reasoning on the North Atlantic issue appears to at least have won over the Official Opposition, with the results of the final treaty negotiations being introduced in the House of Commons on March 28 and approved the same day with only two recorded votes

against, both of which were registered by members of the anti-conscription Bloc populaire canadien.¹³

As historian Donald Creighton noted, Drew “quickly discovered that he had entered the Commons at a moment when the government’s foreign policy had won it wide acclaim, and when domestic affairs could hardly have been more prosperous.”¹⁴ Indeed, the opposition parties’ support for the Liberal government’s North Atlantic Treaty negotiations ensured that the matter ultimately remained a peripheral issue in the 1949 campaign. By allowing St. Laurent to close debate on the Atlantic issue before an election had even been called, the opposition leaders handed the prime minister a significant political victory that he could bring before the electorate as evidence of the government’s accomplishments.¹⁵ This fit well within St. Laurent’s broader campaign message. The prime minister had declared at the start of the campaign that his party would not fight the election on any specific issues, domestic or otherwise; instead, the Grits chose to emphasize their record in office rather than commit to any bold new policies, only promising that if elected that they would offer their “best service” to Canadians.¹⁶ Indeed, the 1949 Liberal platform only makes a passing reference to the issues of foreign policy and national defence. With regard to the now-approved North Atlantic Treaty, the platform simply noted that the party “favours the association of Canada with the United Kingdom, the United States, and the free countries of Europe in a North Atlantic security arrangement.”¹⁷

Although the Progressive Conservative platform for the 1949 election attempted to remind voters that the Tories had unanimously endorsed the establishment of a North Atlantic security organization at their October 1948 convention, by the summer of 1949 such support had been reduced to empty lip-service.¹⁸ On the hustings, secretary of state for external affairs Lester B. Pearson attempted to challenge the extent of the Tories and Cooperative Commonwealth

Federation's professed support for the Treaty. During the final weeks of the election, Pearson lambasted Drew and the Conservatives at a rally in Saskatchewan for the support they had garnered from Quebec premier Maurice Duplessis, whose right-wing Union Nationale party had "opposed Canada's war role, the British Commonwealth and the whole concept of peace through collective security..."¹⁹ Pearson similarly noted that many CCF members outside of the Commons had joined a growing chorus of Communists opposed to a North Atlantic coalition.²⁰ The secretary of state's criticisms were not entirely unfounded; while under the guidance of leader M.J. Coldwell the CCF explicitly ruled out any association or cooperation with the Communist Labour-Progressive Party, the party's 1949 platform contained no mention of the CCF's policy toward the North Atlantic Treaty.²¹

Pearson's accusation that the CCF was hiding internal connections to the Communist Party was (somewhat ironically) one that was also quite forcefully directed by Drew against the Liberal government, a strategy which at least initially appeared to give the Tories an edge over their rivals.²² It was no secret that Drew fell decidedly on the right wing of the political spectrum (especially when compared with John Bracken, his more centrist predecessor,) and the spectre of a hidden Communist agenda in Ottawa fit well within the Conservative leader's broader ideological message. Drew unabashedly beat the rhetorical drum that the ranks of the Liberal bureaucracy had become filled with secret Communists who were working to undermine Canada's interests on the world stage. The solution to this subterfuge, as Drew had boldly declared in the House during St. Laurent's initial months in office, was simple, and perhaps somewhat simplistic: outlaw the Communist party and purge the government of any remaining Communists. Only once Canada had removed the cancer of Communism from within would it be able to dedicate itself to fighting the ideology on a global scale.²³ Unprepared for Drew's sudden

and brash comments, St. Laurent had at first been reluctant to take any immediate action against the Communist party. For a brief moment, it seemed like Drew had found his party's path to victory in the upcoming election. Why were the Liberals so hesitant to up the ante in the fight against Communism? Could it be, Drew opined, that certain members of the Liberal cabinet themselves held Marxist sympathies?

In spite of his initial equivocation in response to Drew's calls for the Communist party to be outlawed, St. Laurent quickly fired back against the Conservative leader's blatantly ideological proposal to outlaw Communism. The prime minister insisted that outlawing Communist politics, no matter how abhorrent their philosophy was, would be completely disproportionate to the actual threat their members posed in Canada. It was St. Laurent's minister of finance, Douglas Abbott, who dealt the final blow to Drew in response to the latter's allegations that the Liberal cabinet was harbouring closeted Marxists, claiming that the Opposition leader reminded him of another Marx: Groucho.²⁴ In that farcical moment, any hope the Conservatives had had of making Communism a defining election issue was lost. Drew, however, refused to be beaten. In the forward to one of the Conservatives' 1949 campaign pamphlets, the party framed the entirety of its policies (both domestic and foreign) around the goal of resisting the influence of totalitarian Communism, declaring that "If the march of Communism is to be halted; if our Canadian Way of Life is to be maintained, and our Free Institutions strengthened and expanded, there must be at the helm in our Country a strong, united Government."²⁵ For Drew, Communist political philosophy was an explicit affront to Canada's founding values and institutions, and the Tories warned that Communism's goal (beyond its potential to insight a third world war) was to destroy the freedom and opportunity that had defined Canada since before Confederation.

During the campaign Drew further attempted to revamp his earlier charge against the St. Laurent government by shifting the focus of his attacks away from Communism and toward socialism more generally. Although he was careful to emphasize that not all socialists were Communists, Drew nevertheless asserted that events in Europe had proven socialism was a “Trojan horse” for an eventual Communist takeover.²⁶ Combined with the accusations that Drew and other prominent Tories made on the campaign trail that socialist ideology was “eating deep into [the] ranks of [the] Liberal Party,” the Conservatives’ insinuation was clear: St. Laurent and the Liberals could no longer be trusted to defend Canada in the global fight against Communism and totalitarian socialism.²⁷

In addition to these more significant questions regarding Communism and the North Atlantic Treaty, other foreign policy issues were intermittently debated throughout the 1949 election. International trade in particular was a theme touched on by all three of the parties included in this study. The Liberals boasted that their trade policies had “made Canada the third-largest trading nation in the world,” and promised to continue to push for further reductions to global trade barriers, specifically with the United States and members of the British Commonwealth.²⁸ The Conservatives, however, contended that the government had diminished Canadian trade in foreign markets such as Great Britain under the naïve assurance that such losses would be offset through increased trade with the United States: “We know ... that disastrous results would follow any attempt to depend exclusively upon exports to one nation no matter how friendly that nation may be.”²⁹ Nevertheless, the Tories were careful to avoid the appearance of anti-Americanism, additionally promising “to adopt every practical means to expand our internal trade with the United States and with all other nations where we can sell what we produce.”³⁰ Unsurprisingly, the CCF’s 1949 trade policy embraced a decidedly

interventionist stance, declaring that trade was ultimately too important to “be left to the mercy of private speculators or the uncertain and unfair controls of tariffs and excise taxes. Only direct public regulation of Canada’s basic exports can stabilize our foreign trade, eliminate exploitation of producer and consumer, and stabilize prices that for our export commodities.”³¹ To this end, the CCF promised that it would establish Import and Export boards for Canada’s various resources and agricultural products in order to ensure that international trade benefited both Canadian producers and consumers.

Despite the unique stance and tone each party adopted in presenting its foreign policy, matters of external affairs held little (if any) significance for the Canadian electorate during the 1949 election. After numerous elections dominated by issues of war, security and conscription, Canadians in 1949 were eager to turn their attention back toward domestic issues. Of the three parties studied here, the Liberals understood this shift in the national mood the best. While the Grits would later harken back to early postwar years as the pinnacle of Canadian diplomacy, in 1949 St. Laurent presented Canadians with a moderate, unadorned foreign policy that reflected his party’s broader election theme of responsible governance and national prosperity. Crucial to this analysis, the notion of Canada as an influential “middle power” or “helpful fixer” (both key golden age constructs) was nowhere to be found in the Liberals’ 1949 campaign. Conservative attempts to make the threat of Communism a key campaign issue were entirely unsuccessful, and the issue of international trade was framed by all three parties as primarily being one of domestic prosperity. St. Laurent had set out to ensure that any campaign issues were as broadly defined as possible, and after two wartime elections his party’s themes of good governance and prosperity proved to be the right message at the right time: the Liberals won an overwhelming majority of

190 seats, more than the party had ever won under the leadership of Mackenzie King, while the Conservatives and CCF were reduced to forty-one and thirteen seats, respectively.³²

During the interim between the 1949 and 1953 elections Canada had once again found itself at war, this time embroiled in a conflict between North and South Korea. The Korean War was in many ways an obvious proxy for the larger Cold War conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union: the democratic southern state was supported by the UN-backed United States and the Communist north found allies in Mao's China and the Soviet Union. The St. Laurent government was initially hesitant to become involved in yet another armed conflict at the war's outbreak in June of 1950. In the House of Commons on June 28, Pearson offered assurances that, pursuant to their UN Charter obligations, Canada would do its part to help stabilize the situation in the Korean Peninsula.³³ Two days later, the prime minister rose to clarify that Canada's contribution would not entail re-armament: "Any participation by Canada in carrying out the foregoing [Security Council] resolution – and I wish to emphasize this strongly – would not be participation in war against any state."³⁴ By August, however, the government had come to recognize that Canada had a vested interest in deescalating a Communist assault that had the potential to spill over into Europe. Although the United States had already begun to intervene in Korea under the auspices of the UN Charter, a stalemate in the Security Council had thus far prevented the assembly of an official UN contingent to respond to the crisis. In the absence of a unified international response, the prime minister acquiesced and announced that Canada would assemble a special brigade to be sent to Korea and assist in the Charter-sanctioned American mission.³⁵ St. Laurent nevertheless assured Canadians that Canada's participation in the conflict would be adapted accordingly should the Security Council work through its internal divisions and establish an official UN Police Division.³⁶

While the North Korean forces were effectively defeated by the fall of 1950, the Korean War officially dragged on for nearly three more years. A ceasefire was finally declared on July 27, 1953, a mere two weeks before the vote for the 1953 federal election. By this point Canadian troops had amassed a total of 1,557 casualties and 312 deaths; Canada and her allies had successfully beaten back the Communist forces on the Korean Peninsula, but it had come at the cost of another frustratingly-prolonged and casualty-laden war.³⁷ The Korean War, however, had proven to be a much bigger boon for the Liberal government than might have otherwise been expected. The Canadian economy, having been in recession since 1947, was suddenly kick-started into wartime mode, allowing the government to lay claim to economically-beneficial emergency powers.³⁸ Heading into the 1953 campaign, the Liberals were further able to pat themselves on the back for the part the Canadian delegation had played in helping to orchestrate the eventual Korean ceasefire. Indeed, one week before the armistice had been officially confirmed, Liberal cabinet minister Paul Martin boasted at an election rally in Sault Ste. Marie that the St. Laurent government had played a “major role” in helping to secure “the apparent imminence of a truce in Korea.”³⁹

The Grits entered the 1953 election with a high degree of confidence in their government’s records and accomplishments, and St. Laurent consequently saw no reason to change his party’s central appeal from the previous campaign. Jack Pickersgill, the prime minister’s long-time adviser and clerk of the Privy Council, later remarked in his memoirs that the Liberals’ 1953 platform was “essentially a repeat performance of the campaign of 1949,” and that “St. Laurent’s main theme throughout the election campaign was the record of the government, but instead of ignoring Drew as he had done in 1949 he repeatedly contrasted the responsible performance of the government and the irresponsible promises of the Opposition.”⁴⁰ Mirroring his appeal to the

Canadian electorate from four years earlier, St. Laurent boldly proclaimed that “The Liberal party is making only one promise. And that is if you decide that we are the right people to carry on your affairs we will do our utmost to serve you as well as we would our own individual families.”⁴¹ To this end, the Liberals outlined twelve general priorities that would receive their attention should Canadians reward them with another term in office, with a predominant focus on domestic issues such as taxation, employment, housing and health insurance.⁴²

As with the rest of their platform, Liberal foreign policy in 1953 closely mirrored 1949 both in tone and emphasis. Of the twelve aforementioned priorities outlined in the Liberal platform, just two referred to matters of foreign policy. The first was with regard to trade, with the Grits’ only committing in this policy area “to use very available means to maintain and expand Canada’s external trade and, to that end, to encourage the removal of trade barriers generally.”⁴³ The second reference to foreign policy was in the latter half of the Liberals’ twelfth and final priority of national unity and national security. The Grits recognized that, despite emerging signs of stability in East-West relations, Canada could not afford to be naïve when it came to questions of national defence.⁴⁴ The language the Liberals used to define their 1953 defence policy is notable in its continued use of moderate, non-partisan language that shied away from sanctimony or grandstanding:

We in the free world must continue the build-up of our defences until we can be reasonably sure that they are adequate to preserve peace. But that does not mean we should rebuff peaceful gestures from behind the iron curtain. We should explore every possibility of better relations while remembering that peace is likely to come only through strength and unity among men and nations of goodwill.”⁴⁵

This passage in particular reaffirms that the Liberals’ policy priorities in 1953 were almost entirely domestic in nature. Moreover, when the Grits did turn their attention toward foreign policy their tone was mostly pragmatic and free of golden age symbolism.

Foreign policy likewise played a limited role in Liberal rhetoric on the campaign trail, and on the few occasions that the Grits did discuss external affairs they generally did so with the same neutral, governmental tone that characterized their printed platform. During a Liberal event in Peterborough on July 21, Lester B. Pearson cautiously urged his audience not to underestimate the continued threat of global war despite the imminence of an armistice in Korea.⁴⁶ Similarly, at a Toronto rally two days before the election, Pearson ridiculed the Tories' "shallow" foreign policy and warned that only a responsible Liberal government could be trusted to secure a lasting peace in Korea and the far east.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, underlying Pearson's comments were early portents of the symbolism that would come to define Liberal foreign policy during his leadership in the 1960s.⁴⁸ At the aforementioned Peterborough rally, Pearson had praised Canada's "most useful role" during the Korean ceasefire negotiations, and at an earlier event in Meaford he had favourably contrasted Canada's "timid" foreign policy from the 1930s with the current government's bolder stance toward external affairs.⁴⁹ Such rhetoric, however, found its basis more in partisan fantasy than in Canada's actual foreign policy record. In a CBC address broadcasted that same year, University of Toronto professor and Canadian Institute for International Affairs member Frank Underhill argued that "our Department of External Affairs still seems to be getting their intellectual clothes tailored for them in the west end of London,"⁵⁰ further concluding that Canadians "shouldn't flatter ourselves that the 1950's are so far in advance of the 1920's after all."⁵¹ While subtle, Pearson's rhetoric was thus indicative of an emerging evolution in Liberal foreign policy rhetoric away from St. Laurent's moderation and toward a more mythologized vision of Canada's diplomatic identity.

Like their Liberal opponents, the Conservatives only made passing reference to foreign policy in 1953, with the main thrust of their appeal to voters focusing on familiar themes such as lower taxes and social security. While Drew did repeat his earlier call for Communist activities be outlawed in Canada, such a policy was no more effective at galvanizing support for the Tories that it had been four years earlier. Apart from this ideological wedge issue, the Conservatives' official position on external relations mostly followed that of their Liberal opponents. Not including their commitment to ban the Communist Party, only two of the sixteen total points that comprised the Conservatives' 1953 election manifesto spoke directly to matters of external relations. Even in the internal 1953 handbook for Conservative candidates and campaign workers, which provided a more detailed breakdown of the party's policy proposals, the overwhelming majority of the Tories' focus remained on domestic affairs.⁵²

The first of the two aforementioned points relating to foreign policy in the 1953 Conservative platform focused on Canada's competitiveness with regard to international trade, referred to here as "World Markets." The Tories' position remained virtually unchanged from 1949, with the party promising to take "constructive steps to break the Dollar-Pound Barrier and regain our vital British and Commonwealth Trade."⁵³ With regard to international affairs and external relations more generally, the party affirmed its support for the continuation of Canada's role in the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Colombo Plan, all of which had been ratified under Liberal administrations. Apart from the question of how to best combat global Communist, Conservative and Liberal foreign policy in 1953 was thus virtually indistinguishable. Indeed, removed from the context of its surrounding platform, it might have been fairly easy to have assumed that the Conservative's statement on international relations had been written by a Liberal!⁵⁴ The Tories' implicit support for the government's foreign policy

accomplishments ultimately curtailed their ability to offer an alternative vision for Canada's role in world affairs and further allowed the Grits to once again own external affairs as an election issue.

Nevertheless, minute differences in the vocabulary used by the Conservatives and Liberals in their respective 1953 platforms underscore a widening philosophical divide between the two parties with regard to the nature of Canada's emerging international identity. When discussing the relationship between the federal government and the provinces in their platform, the Liberals chose what would now be seen as the relatively uncontroversial heading of "federal-provincial relations."⁵⁵ The Conservatives, however, in referring to the same area of policy, opted for the more nostalgic and evocative heading of "dominion-provincial relations."⁵⁶ The actual differences between the two parties on this issue is beside the point. Underscoring the Conservatives' policy was a worldview in which Canada's identity as a federal state was still heavily tied to its continued association with the former British Empire. Yet for the Liberals, as their rhetoric in later elections would demonstrate, such an outlook would have been seen as sentimental and backward-looking. Although St. Laurent's party did not explicitly reference any notion of an independent Canadian identity in 1953, such rhetoric was beginning to take root and would ultimately manifest itself more fully during the Liberal campaigns of the following decade.⁵⁷

Indeed, it was actually the CCF, still under the leadership of Coldwell, who had the most to say in 1953 on the issue of Canada's emerging international identity. The 1950 Vancouver Convention had been a significant event in the history of the party, in which moderates such as Coldwell had wrested political influence away from the CCF's more left-leaning fringes. The convention had further seen Coldwell and his allies come down heavily in favour of Canadian

participation in the Korean War, and in doing so had given a significant political victory to the Liberal government.⁵⁸ Despite this, the 1953 CCF platform proved that the party was well ahead of its two major opponents when it came to furthering Canada's independence from Great Britain and the Commonwealth, declaring that "Canada has the doubtful distinction of being the only member of the Commonwealth which does not have complete freedom to amend its own constitution and which does not have its own national flag. A CCF federal government will adopt a distinctive Canadian flag and national anthem and will give the Canadian people the power to amend their own constitution."⁵⁹ With regard to the rest of its foreign policy the CCF largely repeated what it had pledged four years earlier. The party affirmed and offered its full support for the founding mission of the United Nations, albeit with the rebuke that the organization's principles had of late "often been sacrificed to power politics."⁶⁰ On the issue of international trade, the party continued its decidedly interventionist stance from four years earlier, calling for guaranteed minimum prices for various Canadian exports, while at the same time decrying the protectionism of the United States.⁶¹ On the campaign train, Coldwell maintained that St. Laurent's trade policy would lead to higher tariffs and a reduction in Canadian exports, promising that a CCF government would diversify Canada's trading partners through a "carefully formulated" central plan.⁶² In response to Drew's anti-Communist crusade, the CCF once again expressed its abhorrence for Communism and ruled out any potential for cooperation with the Communist Party. Going one step further than it had in 1949, the party not only condemned any attempt to outlaw Communism but derided such a policy as an expression of "McCarthyism," a not-so-subtle attempt to associate Tory leader Drew with the controversial Republican senator who had helped to incite the initial anti-Communist "Red Scare" south of the border.⁶³

As in 1949, the Liberal message of moderate, responsible governance was one which found broad public support during an otherwise routine election. After nearly two decades in government the Grits had adopted an increasingly bureaucratic stance toward policymaking, and in this regard foreign policy was no exception. As historian Donald Creighton would later describe the 1953 election, “Government by party had virtually ceased to exist. Instead, the Liberals had become the party of government. And it was as the neutral instrument of perfect administration that they approached the general election of 1953. St. Laurent rested complacently on his record.”⁶⁴ In contrast, Conservative policies (not the least of which included Drew’s long-standing promise to ban the Communist Party) came across as at times as bordering on the fanatical. Historian John English would later reflect that “What the electorate saw of George Drew – ‘a harsh, malevolent puritan – and a stuffed shirt to boot’ – they mostly did not like. The Liberal victory was inevitable.”⁶⁵ On election night the Grits were easily reelected with a 170 seat majority, albeit one that was twenty seats smaller than their victory four years earlier.⁶⁶

Unlike the 1949 election, there were no public opinion polls conducted during the 1953 campaign that included questions pertaining to foreign policy or defence. For historians seeking to assess Canadians’ attitudes toward external affairs during this particular election this creates a unique challenge. Nevertheless, a worthwhile effort can be made to better understand how Canadian voters in 1953 interpreted global events by synthesizing the information found in several primary documents from before and after that year’s election. Two Gallup polls from 1951 and 1953 stand out as being particularly useful in this endeavour. In the October 1951 Gallup poll, just fourteen months after St. Laurent announced Canada would be sending troops to the Korean Peninsula, a shocking 82.8% of participants were recorded as having no response to the statement that the Korean War was “utterly useless.”⁶⁷ In spite of the significant casualties

that Canadian troops were enduring on the Korean Peninsula, the voting public remained generally oblivious to the domestic and global implications of this major conflict.

An August 1953 Gallup poll (conducted the same month as that year's federal election) reveals similar levels of indifference amongst Canadians regarding foreign affairs. While 75% of respondents claimed that they were aware of proposals for a meeting between the governments of the United States, Britain, France and Russia to discuss global issues, their views on the potential for such a meeting were more uncertain: 51.2% responded that they believed the meeting decrease global tensions, 16.7% claimed it would increase tensions, 21.5% believed claimed no change would result, and 5.7% and 4.8% respectively offered a response of "qualified" or "other."⁶⁸ The Department of External Affairs' annual report for 1953 further alludes to this general mood of apathy and uncertainty that characterized Canadians' interest in events that lay beyond their country's borders. In discussing the vital role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in European and Middle Eastern affairs, the report warns that "It is important ... that public opinion remain alert, not only to the threat of aggression which still exists, but to the importance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in meeting and defeating that threat."⁶⁹ Despite the fact that the Treaty had played a monumental role in Canadian foreign policy since its ratification in 1949, the government nevertheless still struggled four years later to impress upon Canadians the importance of the coalition to their country's interests abroad.

The Liberals, Conservatives and CCF for the most part repeated in 1957 the foreign policy positions that they had adopted during the previous two elections. St. Laurent and Coldwell were still head of their respective parties, while the Tories had elected maverick Saskatchewan MP John Diefenbaker as Drew's placement six months before the start of the campaign. During the writ all three parties once again affirmed their support for the United

Nations, while the Liberals and Conservatives similarly pledged to remain loyal to Canada's continued role in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.⁷⁰ There was likewise a mutual consensus among the parties that the government should do everything in its power to open up new international markets for Canadian trade exports, although the Tories and CCF specifically called for a redirection of trade away from the United States and toward the United Kingdom and Commonwealth.⁷¹ Additionally, the Conservatives called for tighter control of foreign investment in Canada's resource sector, a practice which the Grits defended as being vital to Canada's continued prosperity.⁷²

The Liberal's platform in 1957 was again framed around a singular promise to "do our best to administer, according to our experience and judgment, for the benefit of the Canadian people."⁷³ As in the previous two elections, the Grits emphasized foreign policy considerably less than the domestic components of their platform, running mostly on their broader administrative record.⁷⁴ Yet by 1957 St. Laurent had become far more willing than he had previously been to point specifically to Liberal foreign policy as having bolstered Canada's prestige on the world stage. In a pamphlet outlining the Liberals' record in office, for example, the party praised the role Lester B. Pearson had played in the creation of the United Nations Emergency Force during the Egyptian Suez Crisis one year earlier, declaring that "Canada's international prestige [has] never [been] higher as Liberal Foreign Policies continue to give strong and active expression to the Canadian People's will for peace."⁷⁵ On the hustings, however, the effectiveness of such rhetoric appears to have been fairly limited. During a campaign speech on foreign policy in Victoria on May 5, St. Laurent endured jeers from the audience as one woman stood up and accused the Liberal government of siding with Russia over England during the Suez Crisis.⁷⁶ The comment epitomized the Canadian electorate's growing

distaste for the Liberal's self-assured approach to governance, a mood that Diefenbaker's Conservatives relentlessly encouraged by similarly criticizing the Liberals for their handling of the affair in Suez.⁷⁷ This broader strategy appears to have at least been somewhat successful, and on election night the Liberals were narrowly defeated by Diefenbaker's Conservatives by a seven-seat margin of 112 to 105.⁷⁸

By focusing on the role of foreign policy in the three federal elections held between 1949 and 1957, this study has revealed several new insights about how both voters and political parties viewed Canada's place in the world during the initial postwar decades. Most notably, this analysis has shown that foreign policy was of limited importance in determining the outcome of these campaigns, a phenomenon which can be attributed to three main factors. First, the Canadian electorate's interest in foreign policy during the initial postwar years was typified by indifference, with opinion polls and government documents from this period highlighting Canadians' general ignorance of external affairs. Despite what golden age mythologizers would later assert, Canadian voters in the postwar era did not appear to have embraced any notion of their nation as an ambitious middle power or a helpful fixer. Second, during these campaigns federal politicians generally had little interest in emphasizing global issues in their election platforms, most likely because (as already noted) such policies generated limited public enthusiasm. Third and finally, the foreign policy agenda established by the governing Liberal Party was defined by both moderation and its pragmatism, even though the Grits gradually became more partisan with regard to such issues toward the latter half of the 1950s.

This last finding is, in one sense, relatively unsurprising; over the course of more than two decades of governance the Liberals would have been required by virtue of their office to formulate foreign policies that were more nuanced and attuned to global realities than those of

the opposition parties. This style of rhetoric furthermore reflected the noncontroversial and understated approach to governance that had characterized the Liberal's rule while under the leadership of William Lyon Mackenzie King. Yet at the same time, the fact that the Liberals were the least partisan with regard to foreign policy is an unexpected discovery. When compared to the zeal with which the party would under the leadership of Pearson later persistently evoke golden age symbolism and language, the deficit of such rhetoric during St. Laurent's leadership is jarring. Indeed, only toward the end of St. Laurent's tenure can any attempt be found on the part of the Liberals to frame their party's foreign policy as being key to Canada's diplomatic identity. This last point in particular should not be neglected by historians, as it highlights the evolution of Canadian foreign policy rhetoric toward the grandstanding golden age platitudes of the 1960s. Nevertheless, during the initial postwar era foreign policy in federal elections, far from what golden age proponents would lead one to assume, was largely distinguished not only by its brevity but also by its moderation, with most parties and voters doing little to challenge the Liberal's modest, pragmatic vision for Canada's role in world affairs.

Endnotes

- ¹ Desmond Morton, "Uncle Louis and a Golden Age for Canada: A Time of Prosperity at Home and Influence Abroad," *Policy Options*, June 1, 2003.
- ² David Webster, *Fire and the Full Moon: Canada and Indonesia in a Decolonizing World* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 194; Greg Donaghy, "Canadian Diplomacy and the Offshore Islands Crisis, 1954-1955: A Limited National Interest," *International Journal* 68, no. 2 (2013): 242-245; Hector Mackenzie, "Knight Errant, Cold Warrior or Cautious Ally? Canada on the United Nations Security Council, 1948-1949," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 7, no. 4 (2009): 453-457; Brian and David Black, "Does Politics Stop at the Water's Edge in Canada?," *International Journal* 65 No. 1 (2008/2009): 7-8; Kristopher Kinsinger, "The Politics of Mythmaking: Foreign Policy in Canadian Federal Elections, 1958-1965" *Waterloo Historical Review* 8 (2016).
- ³ J.W. Pickersgill, *My Years with Louis St. Laurent: A Political Memoir* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965): 92; Canadian Institute of Public Opinion (CIPO), "Gallup Poll, May 1949, #186 (Canada)," (Toronto: Gallup Canada Inc.).
- ⁴ James Bickerton et al., *Ties That Bind: Parties and Voters in Canada* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1999): 33.
- ⁵ Pickersgill, *My Years with Louis St. Laurent*, 45.
- ⁶ Pickersgill, *My Years with Louis St. Laurent*, 47-48.
- ⁷ Pickersgill, *My Years with Louis St. Laurent*, 86.
- ⁸ R.A. Mackay, edit., *Canadian Foreign Policy 1945-1954: Selected Speeches and Documents* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971): 3.
- ⁹ Mackay, *Selected Speeches and Documents*, 93.
- ¹⁰ CIPO, "Gallup Poll, May 1949, #186 (Canada)."
- ¹¹ Mackay, *Selected Documents and Speeches*, 188.
- ¹² Makay, *Selected Documents and Speeches*, 189.
- ¹³ Pickersgill, *My Years with Louis St. Laurent*, 86; *House of Commons Debates, 20th Parliament, 5th Session, Vol. 3* (Ottawa: Library of Parliament, 1949): 2104.
- ¹⁴ Donald Creighton, *The Forked Road: Canada 1939-1957* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976): 173.
- ¹⁵ Pickersgill, *My Years with Louis St. Laurent*, 86.
- ¹⁶ "The Liberal Victory," *The Globe and Mail (1936-Current)*, June 29, 1949; Greg Donaghy, *Grit: The Life and Politics of Paul Martin Sr.* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015): 100.
- ¹⁷ D. Owen Carrigan, edit., *Canadian Party Platforms, 1967-1968* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1968), 185; This excellent edited collection of party platforms contains literature for each of the elections included in this study, and consequently it is cited extensively throughout this paper.
- ¹⁸ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 192.
- ¹⁹ "Lester B. Pearson: Liberal Party Only One United For Atlantic Pact," *The Globe and Mail (1936-Current)*, Jun 10, 1949.
- ²⁰ "Liberal Party Only One United For Atlantic Pact," *The Globe and Mail*.
- ²¹ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 175; Although the CCF's platform did not comment on the North Atlantic Treaty, it did contain the somewhat tacit line that the United Nations "remains the only overall instrument for co-operation among the nations of the world."

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- ²² Robert Bothwell, *Canada Since 1945: Power, Politics and Provincialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981): 133.
- ²³ Bothwell, *Canada Since 1945*, 132-133.
- ²⁴ Bothwell, *Canada Since 1945*, 133.
- ²⁵ *The Progressive Conservative Party's Practical Proposals for a Better Canada* (Ottawa, Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, 1949): 1.
- ²⁶ Warren Baldwin, "George Drew: Socialism Trojan Horse for Communist Seeds, Europe's History Shows," *The Globe and Mail (1936-Current)*, May 31, 1949.
- ²⁷ "Donald Fleming: Socialism Eating Deep Into Ranks of Liberal Party," *The Globe and Mail (1936-Current)*, Jun 13, 1949.
- ²⁸ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 182
- ²⁹ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 180
- ³⁰ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 189
- ³¹ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 174
- ³² Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 167; In the previous election the Conservatives and CCF had won sixty-seven and twenty-eight seats, respectively. The remaining 1949 results for the other parties were: Social Credit: 10; other: 8.
- ³³ Makay, *Selected Documents and Speeches*, 294.
- ³⁴ Makay, *Selected Documents and Speeches*, 298.
- ³⁵ Makay, *Selected Documents and Speeches*, 304; Bothwell, *Canada Since 1945*, 139.
- ³⁶ Makay, *Selected Documents and Speeches*, 303-304.
- ³⁷ Bothwell, *Canada Since 1945*, 140.
- ³⁸ Creighton, *The Forked Road*, 219.
- ³⁹ "Paul Martin: Liberals Factor in Korea Peace," *The Globe and Mail (1936-Current)*, Jul 21, 1953.
- ⁴⁰ Pickersgill, *My Years with Louis St. Laurent*, 194.
- ⁴¹ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 208.
- ⁴² Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 208.
- ⁴³ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 208.
- ⁴⁴ Soviet leader Joseph Stalin had died that past March.
- ⁴⁵ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 209.
- ⁴⁶ Ralph Hyman, "Lester Pearson: Korea Armistice Won't Mean Peace For Whole World," *The Globe and Mail (1936-Current)*, Jul 22, 1953.
- ⁴⁷ "Threat of War Persists, Especially in Far East, Pearson Warns Canada," *The Globe and Mail (1936-Current)*, Aug 08, 1953.
- ⁴⁸ Kinsinger, "The Politics of Mythmaking," 18.
- ⁴⁹ Ralph Hyman, "Lester B. Pearson: Canada Now Indispensable to U.S.," *The Globe and Mail (1936-Current)*, Jul 18, 1953.
- ⁵⁰ *25 Years of Canadian Foreign Policy* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Publications Branch, 1953): 10.
- ⁵¹ *25 Years of Canadian Foreign Policy*, 11.
- ⁵² *1953 Election Handbook for Progressive Conservative Candidates and Workers in the Federal Election* (Ottawa: Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, 1953): i-vi.
- ⁵³ *1953 Election Handbook*, viii.
- ⁵⁴ *1953 Election Handbook*, x.
- ⁵⁵ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 208.

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- ⁵⁶ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 210.
- ⁵⁷ Kinsinger, *The Politics of Mythmaking*, 3.
- ⁵⁸ Benjamin Isitt, "Confronting the Cold War: The 1950 Vancouver Convention and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation," *Canadian Historical Review* 91 No. 3 (2010): 409-501.
- ⁵⁹ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 204.
- ⁶⁰ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 204.
- ⁶¹ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 199.
- ⁶² "M. J. Coldwell: Trade Policy Threat to Economy," *The Globe and Mail (1936-Current)*, Aug 05, 1953.
- ⁶³ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 204.
- ⁶⁴ Creighton, *The Forked Road*, 235.
- ⁶⁵ John English, *The Worldly Years: The Life of Lester Pearson – Volume II: 1949-1972*, (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 1992): 78.
- ⁶⁶ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 197; The remaining seat results for the other parties were: Conservative: 53; CCF: 23; Social Credit: 15; other: 6.
- ⁶⁷ Canadian Institute of Public Opinion (CIPO), "Gallup Poll, October 1951, #214 (Canada)" (Toronto: Gallup Canada Inc.).
- ⁶⁸ Canadian Institute of Public Opinion (CIPO), "Gallup Poll, August 1953, #231 (Canada)" (Toronto: Gallup Canada Inc.).
- ⁶⁹ *Report of the Department of External Affairs: 1953* (Ottawa: Department of External Affairs, 1954): 6.
- ⁷⁰ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 217 & 225; *Liberal Policies Are Creating a Better Life for All Canadians* (Ottawa: National Liberal Federation, 1957) 69; Curiously, the CCF, despite having endorsed the coalition in 1953, offered no formal statement of support for the North Atlantic Treaty in their 1957 platform.
- ⁷¹ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 220 & 230
- ⁷² Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 229; *Liberal Policies Are Creating a Better Life*, 49.
- ⁷³ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 224.
- ⁷⁴ *Liberalism...A Fighting Faith* (Ottawa: National Liberal Federation, 1957): 3; Of the twelve points contained in this pamphlet, none referred to the Grits' foreign policy positions.
- ⁷⁵ *For Tomorrow's Opportunities Vote Liberal* (Ottawa: National Liberal Convention, 1957): 11-12.
- ⁷⁶ Harvey Hickey, "B.C. Audience Jeers St. Laurent's Speech on Foreign Affairs," *The Globe and Mail (1936-Current)*, May 06, 1957.
- ⁷⁷ Dale C. Thomson and Roger F. Swanson, *Canadian Foreign Policy: Options and Perspectives* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1971): 9.
- ⁷⁸ Carrigan, *Party Platforms*, 213-214; The seat results for the other parties were: CCF, 25; Social Credit: 19; other: 4.

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