

# Canada's Reluctant Acceptance of the Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia

Heather Whiteside

In January 1950, the foreign ministers of the Commonwealth countries – Australia, Britain, Canada, Ceylon, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, and South Africa – met in Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to discuss growing issues in Asia. This conference would mark the beginning of the Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia. Canada's enthusiasm for the plan lagged at the start. In the 14-month decision-making process, from January 1950 to February 1951, Canadian policymakers considered entry into the Colombo plan with caution. They refused to agree before discussing the complications the Plan might pose to UN efforts and the financial strain it would impose. Eventually, Lester B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, and R.W. Mayhew, Minister of Fisheries, persuaded the Cabinet that humanitarian responsibilities, the need to halt the communist threat, the benefit to the Canadian economy, and American involvement gave reason enough to contribute. This combination of political, economic, and humanitarian motives eventually convinced the Cabinet to join the Plan in 1951. The decision marked the beginning of direct bilateral assistance in Canadian foreign policy.

The post-war era brought with it new methods of achieving foreign policy objectives for Canada. It challenged Canadians to accept a larger role on the world stage, emerging from the shadows of Britain and the United States. These changes coincided

with the succession of Louis St. Laurent as Prime Minister, leaving Lester B. Pearson to succeed him as the Secretary of State for External Affairs. Both men believed that internationalism was the best approach. Though St. Laurent expressed great interest in foreign policy matters, he avoided playing a prominent role and left much of the work to Pearson and his officials.<sup>1</sup> A new generation of realist internationalist policy-makers – including Escott Reid, Arthur Menzies, and Douglas LePan – emerged. Their focus lay on shifting from pre-war isolationism to assist with Europe's reconstruction, the reordering of the Canadian military, and adapting to the new Cold War structure. Exercising Canada's new status as a middle power became a main priority. Yet labelling this period the 'golden age' in Canadian foreign policy must not be based solely on a Eurocentric perspective. Canadian involvement grew not only in North America and Europe but also in Asia. In the post-war era, many problems in Canadian foreign policy shifted their roots from Europe to Asia. A new relationship emerged; one that can be identified by studying the 'golden age' of Canadian diplomacy. The Colombo Plan is one such example of an increased Canadian presence and interest in Asia.

The evolving Canadian approach to foreign policy occurred at a time when international tensions were increasing in Asia. A growing sense of nationalism was spreading throughout the continent, spurring the independence of a number of colonies. India, Pakistan, and Ceylon achieved relatively stable independent governments, yet Burma's fight for independence resulted in civil war. Indonesia finally achieved independence from the Dutch. The French were attempting to re-establish control in Indochina and conditions there would only worsen in the coming years. Rumbings in

---

<sup>1</sup> Patrick James, Nelson Michaud, and Marc J. O'Reilly, eds. *Handbook of Canadian Foreign Policy*. (Landham: Lexington Books, 2006) p. 35.

Korea presaged the beginning of the Korean War, and the defeat of the Chinese Nationalists made the threat of communism all the more pressing. It was against this backdrop that the Commonwealth foreign ministers met for the first time in Colombo, Ceylon.

British Prime Minister Clement Atlee proposed the idea for the Conference as a forum for discussing issues flowing from Asia, such as the recognition of China, the peace treaty with Japan, the situation in Indochina, and the Burmese civil war.<sup>2</sup> The official agenda made no mention of economic development, much less of aid. Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King had resolutely opposed the idea of deepening Commonwealth relations, but his successor St. Laurent was open to the idea, especially considering that he had no desire to be seen as too closely tied to the United States. Thus Pearson in External Affairs found himself, along with Escott Reid, Deputy Undersecretary for the department, and Arthur Menzies, Head of the Far Eastern Division, flying across the Mediterranean and the Middle East in an RCAF Northstar, with Ceylon as their final destination.<sup>3</sup>

Foreign Ministers were not the only ones travelling to Ceylon at the beginning of 1950. The sterling crisis had given finance ministers reason for concern, and prompted a separate conference of Commonwealth finance ministers that would meet in Ceylon at the same time as the foreign ministers.<sup>4</sup> The sterling bloc, a collection of Commonwealth countries that used the pound sterling as their international unit of account, faced an

---

<sup>2</sup> Canada. Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. "Documents on Canadian External Relations." Volume 16 – 1950. Chapter X.

<sup>3</sup> John A. Munro and Alex I. Inglis, eds. *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, Vol 2.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973) p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory*, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited) p. 158.

economic crisis. Britain had borrowed heavily from these countries during the war and could not afford to pay its debts. India was one of the hardest hit countries and was in desperate need of US dollars to pay for imports from non-sterling nations. The Commonwealth Finance Ministers initially met in London in July 1949 to discuss the sterling crisis, and agreed to increase exports to dollar markets and cut dollar imports by 25 per cent.<sup>5</sup> As a country that relied heavily on trade with other Commonwealth countries, Canada was concerned by the idea of trade restrictions. Canadian officials attended the Tripartite Economic Conference along with Britain and the United States in Washington in September 1949, and realized that in order to mitigate the problem, the rest of the sterling area had to be involved in the discussions in an even more authoritative forum than regular committees in London.<sup>6</sup> This meant that both foreign ministries and finance ministries were involved in the Colombo Conference from the start, setting the stage for even more detailed economic discussion.

The conference began in January 1950 as two separate meetings, one upstairs with the foreign ministers, and the other downstairs with the finance ministers.<sup>7</sup> Upstairs, Gulam Mohammad, Pakistan's minister of finance, and D. S. Senanayake, the Prime Minister of Ceylon, both spoke of the necessity of economic development in their opening remarks. They introduced the matter gradually but never fully elaborated on it. Development did not become a full topic of discussion until Pearson suggested that the two conferences could gain through cooperation. Before the first week was over, the two

---

<sup>5</sup> LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory*, 157.

<sup>6</sup> Jacqueline Shaw, "Grudging Gifts, Canada, The Colombo Plan and the Formation of an Aid Policy." (Carleton University, unpublished M.A. thesis, 1992) p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory*, 155.

meetings had appropriately come together in a room halfway up the staircase joining the two levels.<sup>8</sup>

The first meeting of the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers ended with the presentation of a joint memorandum by the Australian, New Zealand, and Ceylonese governments, which would form the basis of the Colombo Plan.<sup>9</sup> Pearson listened attentively to Indian Prime Minister Nehru's closing speech, in which he stated that democracy in India was threatened from two sides: "first by a direct onslaught by communism; and secondly by an internal weakening, largely due to unfavourable economic conditions in which communism would flourish."<sup>10</sup> Pearson left the conference convinced that aid should be carefully considered, though not without first being "scrutinized by economic advisors so that any ambiguities of working not be misleading."<sup>11</sup> Pearson saw the need for aid but was wary of being drawn into an agreement that he did not completely support.

Pearson's cautious approach was evident throughout the conference. In his opening statement, he stipulated that Canadian participation in discussions did not mean that the government agreed to or accepted proposals for further cuts to Canadian imports.<sup>12</sup> Pearson was also eager to expand the initiative beyond just the Commonwealth by involving the United States.<sup>13</sup> He urged the committee to make use of existing UN resources and specialized agencies instead of reinventing the wheel. Pearson was even

---

<sup>8</sup> LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory*, 171.

<sup>9</sup> Munro and Inglis, *Mike*, 108.

<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey A.H. Pearson, *Seize the Day: Lester B. Pearson and Crisis Diplomacy* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993) p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> Munro and Inglis, *Mike*, 108.

<sup>12</sup> Pearson, *Seize the Day*, 167.

<sup>13</sup> Munro and Inglis, *Mike*, 110.

wary of the type of technical assistance that was provided, arguing that, “ordinary hand pumps may be more suited to some regions than vast irrigation works; and ploughs may be more needed than tractors.”<sup>14</sup> Evidently, Pearson himself identified some of the main criticisms of the Plan that Cabinet would debate for the next fourteen months. He did not want to see UN aims undercut and would have been more comfortable if US support had been secured earlier. Pearson did not want to assume leadership in any initiative if other countries had not already given their full support. The fact that Canada was the only non-sterling country made him even more hesitant; he was aware of Canada’s need to protect its resource currency. The British hoped that an increased flow of US dollars would alleviate the stress placed on their own financial predicament, yet it was clear that Canada alone could not supply the amount required. Above all else, Pearson avoided committing to the proposals at first in order to protect Canadian national interests.

Pearson was swayed by the humanitarian arguments supporting aid. His visit to Asia profoundly affected his worldview and allowed him to put a human face on the extreme poverty in Asia.<sup>15</sup> As he would later declare in the Pearson Report, the clear purpose of international aid is to “reduce disparities and remove inequalities...so that the world will not become more starkly divided between the haves and the have-nots, the privileged and the less-privileged.”<sup>16</sup> This altruistic vision of aid was certainly influenced by his experiences in Ceylon. He used the conference as an opportunity for a round-the-world trip, allowing him to gain a clearer understanding of the problems facing other

---

<sup>14</sup> Munro and Inglis, *Mike*, 110.

<sup>15</sup> Pearson, *Seize the Day*, 51.

<sup>16</sup> Ian Smillie. “Foreign Aid and Canadian Purpose: Influence and Policy in Canada’s International Development Assistance.” *Canada Among Nations 2008: 100 Years of Canadian Foreign Policy*. Ed. Robert Bothwell and Jean Daudelin (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009) p. 185

Eastern countries.<sup>17</sup> He saw first hand the economic difficulties and poor living standards that afflicted people in India and Ceylon and recognized that the concentration of wealth remained in a few hands.<sup>18</sup> In Pakistan, he witnessed the issues stemming from the partition with India and the Kashmir conflict. The three days spent in New Delhi and surrounding villages alerted Pearson to the desperate need for social reform in South Asia.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, he gained a greater understanding of the obstacles to be overcome before the people of South Asia and Southeast Asia could obtain a higher standard of living.

Perhaps if every Canadian cabinet minister had seen what Pearson had during his travels in Asia, their support of the Plan would have been greater. Yet as it stood, most ministers had little knowledge of Asia and easily dissociated themselves from the humanitarian aspect of aid. Pearson presented a preliminary report of the conference to Cabinet on February 22, 1950. He made it clear that military force alone would not prevent the spread of communism in Asia, and that economic development must also be supported.<sup>20</sup> He proposed that Canada join the Consultative Council initiated by Australia, New Zealand, and Ceylon. While Pearson was now convinced of the necessity of the Colombo Plan proposals, Cabinet clearly was not. St. Laurent wanted to know the opinions of UN officials before making any definite decisions, while Minister of Finance Douglas Abbott wanted to be assured that aid would not simply be spent on military

---

<sup>17</sup> Munro and Inglis, *Mike*, 112.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>20</sup> Lester B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, February 22, 1950 in Canada, *House of Commons Debates, second session-21<sup>st</sup> Parliament*. (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1950), p. 131.

expenditures.<sup>21</sup> Cabinet passed the matter of discussing early recommendations of the Colombo Plan on to the Interdepartmental Committee on External Trade Policy (ICETP), chaired by Norman Robertson.

The ICETP was tasked with examining the recommendations of the Consultative Committee and determining their feasibility for Canada. Given the nature of the committee, the matter was viewed from a distinctly trade and economic perspective, and not with the concept of aid in mind.<sup>22</sup> Clifford Clark, Deputy Minister of Finance, and Graham Towers, Governor of the Bank of Canada, were strongly opposed to Canadian contributions. The Canadian government had just recently committed to the UN, NATO, and peacekeeping efforts in Korea, all of which were substantial financial investments. They feared that an aid plan would put unnecessary strain on already scarce resources. The ICETP felt that Canada should send an observer, not an official delegate, to the next meeting of the Consultative Committee in Sydney.<sup>23</sup> This decision was overruled, partly because Pearson had already made a public statement assuring Australia that a Canadian delegate would be present and partly because Canadian involvement could encourage US participation in the program as well.<sup>24</sup>

Cabinet was also concerned that the Kashmir conflict would undermine the effects of aid in the region. India was spending 60 percent of its budget on defence, and critics of the Plan believed that aid would have a small impact given the seemingly larger

---

<sup>21</sup> Canada. Library and Archives of Canada. "Online Cabinet Conclusions," RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, Volume 2646.

<sup>22</sup> Shaw, "Grudging Gifts, Canada, The Colombo Plan and the Formation of an Aid Policy," 45.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>24</sup> John Hilliker and Donald Barry, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1995) p. 83



priorities of the Indian and Pakistani governments.<sup>25</sup> Yet this was refuted with the support of the Minister of Citizenship, who pointed out that it would not be prudent to take any actions that would suggest indifference by Canada to the economic welfare of South- and Southeast Asia, and John Deutsch, who assured Cabinet that ratification of the report did not automatically mean adoption of the financial burden.<sup>26</sup> Grudgingly, and only because they knew that the commitment was minimal, Cabinet ratified the Colombo resolution in March 1950 and accepted full membership on the committee.<sup>27</sup> R.W. Mayhew, Minister of Fisheries, was selected to lead the Canadian delegation to the meeting in Sydney with Douglas LePan as his advisor since Pearson was attending a NATO meeting in London at the time.

Despite the Cabinet's acceptance of membership in the Consultative Committee, the Canadian delegation remained cautious in their commitment to direct economic aid. Mayhew had strict instructions to "carefully avoid at this stage committing the Canadian Government in any way, either directly or by interference, to extending financial assistance to the countries of South- and Southeast Asia."<sup>28</sup> The Australian Foreign Minister, Percy Spender had conflicting ideas. Initially, he had personally invited Pearson to the conference and assured him that Canadian attendance would not mean commitment. He maintained that he was simply encouraging Canadian involvement in the hopes of persuading the US to get on board. Yet once all the delegates had arrived in Sydney, Spender quickly changed his attitude. He immediately proposed the formation of

---

<sup>25</sup> Pearson, *Seize the Day*, 53.

<sup>26</sup> Canada. Library and Archives Canada. "Online Cabinet Conclusions," RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, Volume 2646.

<sup>27</sup> Munro and Inglis, *Mike*, 109.

<sup>28</sup> Hilliker and Barry, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 83.

a concrete organization that would be financed by the Commonwealth governments.<sup>29</sup> This was in clear opposition to stated Canadian interests. Mayhew was firm on his stance and refused to make a commitment until he had a full set of facts.<sup>30</sup> With only Pakistan supporting the Australian position, Spender was forced to modify his proposal to include only an offer of technical assistance. It was also suggested that the assistance be organized bilaterally, eliminating the need for a central fund or council.<sup>31</sup>

The conference concluded with a proposal to have each Asian country create a six-year economic development plan by September 1, 1950, which would be presented at the next meeting of the Consultative Committee in London. Despite the rift between Australia and other Commonwealth countries, the final communiqué showed that the Sydney meeting had made definite progress. Immediate technical assistance would be offered bilaterally and a Standing Committee on Technical Assistance was created to organize technical assistance amounting to £8 million.<sup>32</sup> Non-Commonwealth countries would be invited to join the committee at their next meeting in London.<sup>33</sup>

Mayhew returned to Ottawa with a positive impression of the conference and proposed to Parliament that Canada assist with the provision of technical assistance. He suggested that Canada contribute half a million dollars per year. On June 12, Cabinet authorized \$400,000 to be contributed for one year on the condition that it did not overlap with existing UN initiatives.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Pearson, *Seize the Day*, 54.

<sup>30</sup> Munro and Inglis, *Mike*, 198.

<sup>31</sup> Online Cabinet Conclusions, RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, Volume 2646.

<sup>32</sup> R. A. McKay, *Canadian Foreign Policy 1945-1954*. Carleton Library Series 51. (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1971) p. 365.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Online Cabinet Conclusions, RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, Volume 2646.

It was evident that the British were key to the success or failure of the Colombo Plan and Cabinet initially chose to take whatever action they did.<sup>35</sup> Once Britain had decided to become full members, Canada followed suit. In fact, Escott Reid did not think it would have been possible for Pearson to convince the Cabinet that the plan was a good idea had it not been for the fact that it was a Commonwealth scheme that would benefit its newest members: India, Pakistan and Ceylon.<sup>36</sup> The fact that in 1950, Asia represented all of the non-white Commonwealth countries made it easy to use imperial rhetoric to mobilize efforts to help the Commonwealth.<sup>37</sup> Yet it was also glaringly apparent that Canada could not supply the dollar aid alone. American involvement was imperative. The US was ambiguous about the amount of aid they were willing to contribute, although the U.S. State Department expressed interest in the draft report of the Plan in September 1950. At the end of the London conference, where the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia was officially drafted, the key players were hesitant to make any firm financial contributions. Canada was clearly waiting to see what decisions would be made by Britain and the US before taking action.

In cabinet, the debate was far from over. It would take them the following five months, from September to January, to reach a conclusion about their contribution to the Colombo Plan. Uncertainty about the aims and purpose of aid programs was a large concern for the Canadian government.<sup>38</sup> Douglas Abbott argued that the Colombo Plan was duplicating the efforts of the United Nations Expanded Program of Technical

---

<sup>35</sup> Munro and Inglis, *Mike*, 111.

<sup>36</sup> Escott Reid, *Envoy to Nehru*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1981) p. 18.

<sup>37</sup> Keith Spicer, "Clubmanship Upstaged: Canada's Twenty Years in the Colombo Plan," in *International Journal*, (Vol. 25, No. 1, 1969) p. 25.

<sup>38</sup> Pearson, *Seize the Day*, 57.

Assistance (UNEPTA).<sup>39</sup> Having just committed to the UN, it seemed foolhardy to invest in other mechanisms that would be achieving the same end. Financial commitments to NATO continued to increase in light of rearmament.<sup>40</sup> It was finally decided that one-fifth of the amount allotted to the Colombo Plan would be reallocated to the UN and officials were encouraged to continue efforts to merge the two programs.<sup>41</sup> St. Laurent was especially concerned by the overlap in goals between the Colombo Plan and existing organizations, and certainly questioned whether or not the UN could deliver technical assistance more effectively.

Though both Pearson and LePan's personal views supported the idea that the Colombo plan should be motivated by humanitarian factors, Pearson chose to emphasize the threat of communism as a leading motivator on public record.<sup>42</sup> "There is no more important question in the world today," Pearson proclaimed, than the possibility that "communist expansionism may now spill over into southeast Asia."<sup>43</sup> Containing Soviet communism within its borders and fortifying Asia against encroachment was paramount. The North Korean invasion of the South in June 1950 made this all the more clear, demonstrating just how vulnerable the foundations of democracy were in the East. Keith Spicer asserted in 1961 that "however smug and clever Canada's rationalizations for aid became in the later years, it is well to recall that the Colombo Plan crystallized essentially to stop the Red and Yellow Perils."<sup>44</sup> At the consultative committee meeting in London in September 1950, the importance of foreign aid in the promotion of democratic stability

---

<sup>39</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Volume 16.

<sup>40</sup> Pearson, *Seize the Day*, 54.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>43</sup> Pearson, *House of Commons Debates*.

<sup>44</sup> Spicer, "Clubmanship Upstaged," 24.

was pushed to the forefront.<sup>45</sup> The end result of the conference was a recommendation that Canada contribute \$25 million annually, an increased amount that was proposed in light of the increase in security concerns.

Even considering the communist threat and the Korean War, this \$25 million proposal was met with opposition from Cabinet. St. Laurent's support was "at best lukewarm."<sup>46</sup> Pearson, however, convinced him to change his mind. Pearson wrote to St. Laurent the day before Cabinet met to decide on the issue and argued that the Colombo Plan provided the opportunity to facilitate better Indian-American relations.<sup>47</sup> As an avid supporter of internationalism and Canada's role as linchpin in international relations, St. Laurent was convinced. Pearson also correctly assumed that St. Laurent would want to discuss the Plan in a positive light at the upcoming meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers.<sup>48</sup> Pearson's speech in the House of Commons on February 21 also highlighted the ongoing discussions with India regarding the purchase of Canadian wheat with the funds provided as part of the Colombo Plan.<sup>49</sup> This wheat deal was integral in convincing Cabinet that aid would have economic benefits not only for the recipient countries but for Canada as a donor country as well. Aid would stimulate global economic growth, which would in turn stimulate Canada's own export-led economy.<sup>50</sup> Pearson's arguments were enough to sway St. Laurent, Abbott, and the other harshest critics. On February 7, Cabinet finally approved a Canadian grant of \$25 million for 1951-1952, on the condition

---

<sup>45</sup> Hilliker and Barry, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 84.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Pearson, *Seize the Day*, 58.

<sup>48</sup> Munro and Inglis, *Mike*, 219.

<sup>49</sup> Lester Pearson, "Canada and the Colombo Plan," in Arthur B. Blanchette, *Canadian Foreign Policy 1945-2000* (Ottawa: The Golden Dog Press, 2000) p. 169.

<sup>50</sup> Margaret Catley-Carlson, "Aid: A Canadian Vocation," in *Daedalus*, (Vol. 117, No. 4, 1988) 320.

that other member countries hold up their end of the bargain.<sup>51</sup> Pearson wasted no time in mentioning that “Canadians, as individuals – and this has been clearly reflected in the press from one end of the country to the other – wish to contribute to the success of this plan. The desire of the people of Canada, to extend assistance, has also been clearly shown in the debate on the speech from the throne.” He recognized that public opinion in Canada was almost unanimously supportive of assistance to the Colombo Plan, a fact that Cabinet could not ignore.

The role of the US had also been an important factor in Canadian decision-making. The US State Department had seemed favourable at first, and President Harry Truman had identified aid to Asia as an important part of his foreign policy in 1949. The US was even more cognizant of the threat of communism than Canada was, making support of democratization in the East a strong priority. It was clear that the setup of the Marshall Plan – designed for a country with a devalued currency decreased trade and shortage of capital and consumer goods – would not be effective in underdeveloped Asia.<sup>52</sup> Technical assistance was the answer, and the US had the financial capacity to support it.

On December 12, 1950, the US agreed to participate in the Colombo Plan on the condition that other governments would announce their contributions. This step was enough for Canada, and although the exact amount of the US contribution had not been revealed, it was enough to persuade Cabinet to approve the Canadian contribution to the Plan for the first year, with future contributions to be determined later. US involvement was evidently a decisive factor in the cautious Canadian approach to the Plan, although

---

<sup>51</sup> Pearson, *Seize the Day*, 60.

<sup>52</sup> Shaw, “Grudging Gifts, Canada, The Colombo Plan and the Formation of an Aid Policy,” 4.

Pearson attempted to argue in Cabinet that Canada was fully capable of taking a different course and sticking with the Commonwealth.<sup>53</sup> However, the timing of Canada's final approval of the Colombo Plan says otherwise. It was not until the US had made a formal commitment that Cabinet was willing to commit a dollar amount.

It took over a year for the Canadian government to consider the implications of the Colombo Plan. The divisions in Cabinet between the old guard of the King era and the newer MPs prolonged the debate. Pearson supported the Colombo Plan, though initially he was only willing to consider its proposals, not commit. A clear shift in the opinion of the Canadian Cabinet can be traced throughout the fourteen months of deliberations. Ministers were cautious at first, not wanting to commit Canadian taxpayers money to a scheme that might compete with existing UN activities. Though LePan believed that humanitarianism was the underlying motivator, the official sources provide another view. Many officials, such as Pearson, were personally moved by the plight of Asia. Yet individual ethics cannot be confused with larger government objectives. The major factors that influenced Canada's decision to support the Colombo Plan were the Korean War and Cold War security concerns, the involvement of the United States and Britain, and the fact that supplying aid could in fact benefit the Canadian economy through wheat trade with India. These benefits became apparent only in the latter half of the discussions. Up until then, there was strong opposition from members of the Intergovernmental Committee on External Foreign Trade, as well as other members of parliament who were wary of new financial commitments to countries on the opposite side of the globe. Pearson and Mayhew took a cautious approach to negotiating the Plan

---

<sup>53</sup> Munro and Inglis, *Mike*, 222.

and were slow to commit to anything that was not clearly in Canadian interests, especially when not all the facts were presented and all options explored. Only when the clear benefits to Canada became evident did they fully endorse the Plan and manage to persuade Cabinet to support it as well. It is pleasant to believe that Canada began its legacy of bilateral international aid during its 'golden era' of diplomacy because of humanitarian concerns. Although these played a supporting role, the main reasons for Canada's contributions to the Colombo Plan were driven by national self-interests.



## Bibliography

- Canada. Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. "Documents on Canadian External Relations."  
Volume 15 – 1949.  
Volume 16 – 1950.  
Volume 12 – 1951.
- Catley-Carlson, Margaret. "Aid: A Canadian Vocation," in *Daedalus*. Vol. 117, No. 4, 1988.
- Hilliker, John and Barry, Donald. *Canada's Department of External Affairs*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1995.
- James, Patrick, et. al. *Handbook of Canadian Foreign Policy*. Landham: Lexington Books, 2006.
- LePan, Douglas. *Bright Glass of Memory*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1979.
- Munro, John and Inglis, Alex, eds. *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, Vol 2*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973.
- Pearson, Geoffrey. *Seize the Day: Lester B. Pearson and Crisis Diplomacy*. Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993.
- Pearson, Lester. "Canada and the Colombo Plan," in Arthur B. Blanchette, *Canadian Foreign Policy 1945-2000*. Ottawa: The Golden Dog Press, 2000.
- Reid, Escott. *Envoy to Nehru*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Shaw, Jacqueline. "Grudging Gifts, Canada, The Colombo Plan and the Formation of an Aid Policy." Carleton University, unpublished M.A. thesis, 1992.
- Spicer, Keith. "Clubmanship Upstaged: Canada's Twenty Years in the Colombo Plan," in *International Journal*. Vol. 25, No. 1, 1969.