Diefenbaker and Latin America

Diefenbaker and Latin America: The Pursuit of Canadian Autonomy

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INTRODUCTION

A Populist in Foreign Affairs, *Rogue Tory* and *Renegade in Power* are but a few of the titles of books that purport to examine the life and career of John G. Diefenbaker, the thirteenth Prime Minister of Canada.[1] The inference in the titles is that this was a man who refused to follow convention and was not afraid to move in radically new policy directions––a rogue, a renegade, a populist. Diefenbaker's policy towards Latin America, while a subject given little attention by historians and writers, provides a useful example of Diefenbaker's embrace of the idea of Canada pursuing new directions in international affairs.

When it came to foreign affairs, Diefenbaker consistently applied the same criterion to his policy deliberations. He asked himself whether a particular policy was in Canada's national interest. The term "national interest" is a contested one but for the purposes of this study Steven Kendall Holloway's interpretation of the term will be used.[2] Holloway argues that there are five general principles that govern a state's national interest. A state seeks to survive and be secure from attack; be as autonomous as possible; maintain its domestic unity or cohesion; be as economically prosperous as possible; and have principled self-justification and prestige in the international system.[3] Each leader places different emphasis on the five principles and for Diefenbaker, the primary principle was the promotion of Canadian autonomy.

For Diefenbaker, autonomy meant freedom of choice. It did not mean that he wanted to pursue neutrality or a position of non-alignment; Canada was clearly aligned with the US and other member-nations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Rather Diefenbaker simply

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[1] H. Basil Robinson, *Diefenbaker's World: A Populist in Foreign Affairs* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989); Denis Smith, *Rogue Tory: The Life and Legend of John G. Diefenbaker*. (Toronto: Macfarlane, Walter and Ross, 1995); Peter C. Newman, *Renegade in Power: The Diefenbaker Years* (Toronto: MacClelland and Stewart, 1963).

[2] See Steven Kendall Holloway, *Canadian Foreign Policy: Defining the National Interest*. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006). Note that it is Holloway's theoretical framework of the National Interest Perspective which is being used and not his interpretation of Diefenbaker's record.

[3] *Ibid*., 14.

believed that Canada needed to be free to choose which actions would best serve its interests. He rejected the proposition, embraced by the previous Liberal government under Louis St. Laurent that Canada's interests were best served by maintaining a close relationship with the US and mirroring, in many cases, US policy. Such an approach, he believed, would mean sacrificing Canadian freedom of action.

Keeping a respectful distance from the US lay at the heart of the Diefenbaker government's position towards Latin America. The goal of promoting Canadian trade and commerce in the region was carried forward from the St. Laurent years. But Diefenbaker went further than St. Laurent and William Lyon Mackenzie King (St. Laurent's predecessor), by taking steps to develop a relationship with individual countries in Latin America and with the region's multilateral organization, the Organization of American States (OAS), recognizing that the US Administration had reservations about the growth of communism in such a nearby region.

One of most striking things about Diefenbaker's approach towards developing the Canada-Latin America relationship was his tendency to insert himself personally in the processes by which his government formulated and implemented policy towards the region. The record shows that Diefenbaker supported, and involved himself in the implementation of, succeeding initiatives with select Latin American countries – for the larger purpose of developing Canada's interests in the region. He did this on a consistent basis, facilitating policy implementation by establishing a personal relationship with specific Latin American leaders who had the power and influence to make important decisions. Generally speaking, he had little patience for utilizing the formal diplomatic structures and processes to develop Canada's relationships with other countries, or for drawn out negotiations with them.[4] He liked to use a more personal style of diplomacy to build strong relationships—in Latin America with leaders such as Adolfo López Mateos of Mexico, Sir Grantley Adams of the Federation of the West Indies, Dr. Arturo Frondizi of Argentina, as well as with officials from Brazil.

There were a number of international pressures that helped shape Diefenbaker's policies towards Latin America. Pressure from the US but, as importantly, from the various Latin American nations themselves, played an important role in determining policies towards the region. It was a shared view among the leaders of countries such as Mexico, Argentine, Brazil, the Federal of the West Indies, and Cuba that Canada's presence in the region could help, in certain instances, to moderate or dilute the strong

[4] Robinson, 35.

influence of the US in the region. They actively courted Diefenbaker, who then saw an opportunity to expand Canadian economic and political interests in the region. The personal relationships that Diefenbaker was able to establish with some of these leaders would be instrumental in developing trade and other linkages.

Domestic influences also played a role in shaping Canadian policy. Diefenbaker's Latin American policies were deeply influenced by his Cabinet. He believed that the Cabinet should occupy a central place in the government's decision-making on all policy matters, including even the smallest issues such as credit insurance on exports. His desire to expand Canada's presence in Latin America was supported in Cabinet by ministers such as Howard Green, George Hees, Gordon Churchill, Pierre Sevigny and Sidney Smith. With the exception of the Cuban Missile Crisis, there was a consensus in Cabinet about Canada's Latin American policies.

Diefenbaker was somewhat successful in his efforts to promote Canadian trade and other interests in Latin America. He was the first Canadian Prime Minister to visit the region, and he subsequently sent Canada's first foreign ministers there. In nearly every Latin America country in which Diefenbaker took an active interest, trade increased, and it was under his government that Canada finally established embassies in every Latin American nation.[5] With each country that either he visited or from which Canada received a visit by a Latin American head of state or head of government, trade levels as measured by export and imports increased.

Despite such successes, there is little historical record of them. There have been no books or articles written that examine Diefenbaker's Latin American policies in their entirety. In fact, with the singular exception of Cuba, there are virtually no works that deal with Diefenbaker and countries in Latin America. There are a few books that have a page or two that deal with some aspect of his government's position towards Latin America but there is none that focuses on Diefenbaker specifically.[6] The works that discuss Diefenbaker's Latin American policies do so as part of some larger topic, such as his foreign policy more generally or the man himself. The exception, of course, is Cuba and more specifically the

[5] Statistics are provided in later chapters, however, in each of the nations mentioned trade in terms of exports to and imports from Canada increased between 1957 and 1963.

[6] For example, Peter McKenna discusses Diefenbaker's decision to not join the O.A.S. in less than 3pages in his work, *Canada and the O.A.S.: From Dilettante to Full Partner* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995).

Cuban Missile Crisis—a case, however, which reflects the definitive attribute of Diefenbaker's approach to the Latin American region—his tendency to approach the issues in a personal way based on a consistent application of his beliefs.

It was this tendency to personalize Canada's relations with Latin America, however, that created limits to what the Diefenbaker government would be able to achieve in the trade and other policy fields. As much as Diefenbaker was inclined to want to expand Canada's relationship with the Latin American region, viewing it as a signature way of building Canada's foreign policy outward beyond North America, the connections that he was able to establish with individual countries were hampered by their dependence on the short-term personal connections that he was able to establish with their leaders. When they lost power or were forced from office, the connections that he had been able to make were effectively lost.

The historical view of Diefenbaker has been shaped by his government's place in the Canadian political narrative. The Diefenbaker government was preceded by the so-called "Golden Age" of Canadian foreign policy (1945-57), which included the last years of the government of William Lyon Mackenzie King and that of Louis St. Laurent.[7] Pearson, who as St. Laurent's External Affairs Minister won the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in the Suez Crisis, is often linked to, and compared with Diefenbaker because the two men dominated Canadian politics between 1957 and 1967.[8] These comparisons often cast Diefenbaker in an unfavorable light.[9]

The theory of the Golden Age of Canadian foreign policy argued that during the period immediately following the Second World War, Europe and Japan were devastated. Canada, spared the destruction visited on much of the rest of the developed world, thus wielded economic, military and diplomatic influence in world affairs that was out of proportion to its size.[10] Furthermore, between 1945 and 1957, the Canadian government benefited from having a number of highly capable individuals in the Department of External Affairs. The government, led first by King and then St. Laurent, allowed the Department to take the lead in establishing a reputation for Canada in the post-war international system. The

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[7] For a detailed account of the "Golden Age" theory see Andrew Cohen, *While Canada Slept: How We Lost Our Place in the World* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2004) 5-20.

[8] For example, see Jack Granatstein, *Canada 1957-1967: The Years of Uncertainty and Innovation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986).

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] Cohen, 4-20.

combination of capable men and a favorable geo-political climate led to the Golden Age in Canadian foreign policy.

The theory unfortunately creates a problem for those who seriously want to understand Diefenbaker's foreign policy. The unspoken corollary of any theory that argues for a golden age is that the period which immediately follows is diminished by comparison. In other words, a golden age is not followed by an even better period but by a worse one. Thus, the acceptance of the idea of a golden age in Canadian foreign policy creates a starting point for the study of the Diefenbaker government's foreign policies, in which the assumption is that Canada suffered an immediate decline in its international influence.

The fact is that Canada's international influence did not go into a free-fall with the arrival of the Diefenbaker government. What is true is that as Europe and Japan recovered from the ravages of the Second World War, Canada's economic position declined in relation to these countries. But Diefenbaker's detractors point instead to erroneous economic and social policies pursued by a government headed by a prairie lawyer who suffered from serious character flaws. This was a Prime Minister who was not in the same league as his predecessors King and St. Laurent and his successor Pearson.

Pearson not only won the Noble Peace Prize in 1957 but he is also credited with redefining Canada's international role as a middle power that could best exercise influence by working with other nations, including the US, in multilateral organizations.[11] Despite Pearson's electoral failings (he is the only Liberal Prime Minister in the 20th century, aside from John Turner, who did not win at least one majority government) he continues to be viewed as one of Canada's greatest Prime Ministers, both by academics and by the general public. In 2004, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) held a contest to see who was "The Greatest Canadian," Pearson finished 6th and Diefenbaker 47th.[12] In 1997, *Maclean's* magazine asked 25 historians to rank Canada's Prime Ministers and once again Pearson was ranked 6th while Diefenbaker was 13th.[13]

From a diplomatic perspective, the greatest difference between Pearson and Diefenbaker was their respective views on Canada's most important international relationship, the one with the US. Where Diefenbaker sought greater autonomy from the US, Pearson, like St. Laurent, believed in

[11] John Holmes, "Most safely in the middle" *International Journal* 39, no. 2, 367-368.
[12] *The Greatest Canadian*. Producer, Mark Starowicz. CBC. November 29th, 2004.
[13] Norman Hillmer, Jack Granatstein, "Historians Rank the Best and Worst Canadian Prime Ministers," *Maclean's*, April 21st, 1997.

maintaining a close relationship with Washington. Pearson's US policies were supported by some of Canada's most pre-eminent diplomatic historians and foreign policy experts who viewed an amicable relationship with the United States as one of the most important keys to Canadian prosperity.[14]

These historians believe that their interpretation is well supported by the fact the Canadian-US relationship, which was strained by the personal conflicts between Diefenbaker and US President John F. Kennedy, improved immediately with Pearson's victory in the 1963 election. Yet little mention is made of Pearson's decision to continue two of Diefenbaker's main Latin American policies: maintaining diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba and remaining outside the OAS. Instead the discussion of Canadian foreign policy in the post-war years has focused on the accomplishments of Pearson's middle-power internationalism. Thus the Diefenbaker era has occupied a dubious space in foreign policy literature, viewed by many as a transitional phase between the Golden Age and the Trudeau era. Historians have written extensively about the King and St. Laurent period as well as the Pearson and Trudeau years but few have written about Diefenbaker.

This study attempts to focuses on those Latin American and Caribbean states, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, the Federation of the British West and Cuba, upon which Diefenbaker took a personal interest. Chapter One begins by examining Diefenbaker's formative years, including the influences in his youth and adulthood that shaped his approach to political life. Diefenbaker's life on the Prairies, his career as a criminal lawyer, and his family life all played important roles in shaping the personal attributes that would in turn influence his approach to political and policy questions while in government.

Chapter Two examines the geo-political context that shaped Canadian foreign policies towards Latin America following the Second World War as well as the policies of the Liberal governments of William Lyon Mackenzie King and Louis St. Laurent upon which Diefenbaker often built. Canada's changing relationship with Great Britain, the growing predominance of the US, as well as the progress of the Cold War all played important roles in influencing how various Canadian governments in the post-war world conceptualized their Latin American policies.

Chapter Three focuses on Diefenbaker's policies towards the Federation of the West Indies. The Federation was born in 1958 and

[14] Amongst them are historians John Holmes, *Canada: A Middle-Aged Power* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976) and Granatstein, *Canada 1957-1967*.

looked to Canada as a model to follow in terms of bridging geographic and cultural differences in a nation. Its leader, Sir Grantly Adams, formed a strong personal bond with Diefenbaker. Diefenbaker approved a $10 million aid package to the new nation, evidently feeling a sentimental attachment to the islands and leading him to try and assist the newly born federation whenever possible.

Chapter Four shifts the focus to Mexico, a nation that shared with Canada the unique experience of bordering the United States. The Mexican government actively sought to increase the country's ties to Canada and Diefenbaker made the first Prime Ministerial visit to a Latin American nation when he visited Mexico in 1960. He left with the strong belief that Canada was missing opportunities for the expansion of trade and political influence in Latin America. His visit also led him to decide to actively explore joining the Organization of American States.

Chapter Five explores how Diefenbaker came very close to bringing Canada into the OAS. In this organization he saw a potential vehicle for the pursuit of Canadian interests in Latin America. He also felt that if Canada joined the organization, it could act as a bridge between Europe and Latin America. There was pressure from numerous Latin American nations, most prominently Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, for Canada to join, but in the end Diefenbaker's deteriorating relationship with US President John F. Kennedy led him to decide that the risks of membership ultimately outweighed the benefits.

Chapter Six looks at Diefenbaker's policies towards the two largest nations of South America: Brazil and Argentina. In both nations there was an active attempt to bring about closer relations with Canada. Diefenbaker was receptive to strengthening the Canadian relationship with both countries and developed a strong personal relationship with the presidents of both. However, when the leadership in Argentina and Brazil changed, the primary connection with Diefenbaker was lost and the positive momentum that pushed the nations closer disappeared.

The last two chapters focus on Cuba. Chapter Seven examines Diefenbaker's reaction to and policies towards the Cuban Revolution. As US-Cuban tensions increased in response to the Revolution, the United States decided to implement an economic embargo and asked Canada to join it. Despite his excellent relationship with then President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Diefenbaker refused. Canada had little reason to join the boycott as the Cuban government did not nationalize or appropriate Canadian companies. Furthermore, Diefenbaker believed that since Canada maintained economic relations with other communist states there

was little justification in joining the embargo based on Cuba's adoption of a communist system of government.

Chapter Eight takes a closer look at one of Diefenbaker's most controversial foreign policy decisions—his two-day hesitation in authorizing the Canadian military to raise the alert status for Canada's NORAD forces during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The decision reflected both his insistence that Canada achieve greater autonomy in foreign affairs vis-à-vis the US and his inclination to personally intervene in the decision-making process to guide Canadian policy. Canada, he believed, needed to make its own choice on when or whether to offer full support to the US. The timing of his decision-making was influenced by his personal relationship with Kennedy and his beliefs concerning the origins of the crisis and the nature of the threat.

Diefenbaker's policies towards Latin America reflected his view that Canada's national interest was best served by pursing a foreign policy that achieved greater autonomy from the US than under previous Canadian governments. The St. Laurent government had operated from the presupposition that Canada's national interest was best served by maintaining a close relationship with the United States and broadly supporting American foreign policy. Diefenbaker's Latin American policy was driven and implemented by strong personal leadership, and was based on his particular perception of Canada's national interest. This did not mean that his policies marked a complete departure from those of the previous Liberal government; rather, in many instances, they built upon them.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Diefenbaker attempted to implement his Latin American policy largely through the use of personal intervention and involvement on specific policy issues. His tendency to intervene personally in matters was principally the result of the formative circumstances of his upbringing and his political career prior to his election as Prime Minister in 1957. Diefenbaker was used to working and making decisions alone; his strength, he believed, was in taking decisive action not engaging in extensive consultation or delegation. He followed this belief throughout both his legal and early political careers and his successes therein only served to reinforce his tendencies in this regard. It was this emphasis on self-reliance that contributed to the fact that Canada's Latin America policy under Diefenbaker often reflected his own ideas, convictions and vision.[1]

Diefenbaker's decision-making was shaped by a number of his personal characteristics, including his self-reliance, and it was underscored by a strong sense of personal freedom. Diefenbaker valued the freedom to follow one's own convictions and to act autonomously. He projected this value into the international arena and felt that Canada needed to act in a similar manner in foreign affairs. Canada needed to be able to follow a more autonomous path that reflected Canadian values and interests. Thus, he rejected continentalism and lessened the emphasis on keeping close to the US on foreign policy issues. This desire to chart a new course was buttressed by a strong single-mindedness, a tendency to ultimately make decisions alone and a supreme confidence in his own decisions. Diefenbaker liked to rely on numerous sources of information and refused to accept that any source should predominate, yet, paradoxically, this did not lead him to develop his skills as a conciliator as the flow of information was almost always in one direction, from the source to Diefenbaker.

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[1] Howard H. Lentner, "Foreign Policy Decision Making: The Case of Canada and Nuclear Weapons" *World Politics*, 29, no. 1, (1976): 56.

Diefenbaker's Latin American policy was directly influenced by a number of these personal qualities and beliefs. These were developed and honed by a life-time spent on the wind-swept Prairies, struggling for political success and arguing in the defense of those accused of criminal action before crowded court rooms. They were also deeply influenced by his family, particularly the trinity of women who dominated his personal life: his mother Mary, his first wife Edna and his second wife Olive.

Although on the surface, the Canadian Prairies and Latin America would appear to have had little in common, Diefenbaker perceived a warmth and sense of community in Latin America that reminded him of his upbringing on the Prairies. For a young John Diefenbaker the Prairies were filled with people to whom class and ethnicity were of minor importance. He found a warmth and sense of community there that were in stark contrast to his experiences in Toronto, where he had frequently visited with his father while the family lived in Ontario.[2] In his memoirs Diefenbaker recalled journeying with his father out West to claim land for homesteading. The two ran out of food and stopped by a small hospice that was home to a Swedish bachelor. The latter provided the two with supper and Diefenbaker remembered, though the food was awful, it was the best the man had and he gave of it willingly and without complaint. "It was" he wrote "a typical example of Prairie hospitality."[3] It was in this experience and others similar to it - like the many times that his family entertained Mennonites, Doukobors, and Ukrainians in their small schoolhouse - that Diefenbaker developed a deep fondness for overt displays of personal affection.[4]

Diefenbaker would consistently encounter similar displays while he attempted to implement his Latin American policy. He came across these demonstrations when he traveled to Mexico and when he received leaders from Argentina and the West Indies. As well, the reports of various Canadian dignitaries who were sent to represent the Canadian government to Brazil, Mexico and Argentina were filled with comparable acts of affection towards the Canadians and often Diefenbaker himself. Whether it was Brazilian President Juscelino Kubitschek informing Diefenbaker that they were both the sons of immigrants or Argentine President Dr. Arturo Frondizi telling Diefenbaker that his visit to Canada left him with the best

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[2] Diefenbaker, *One Canada: Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker, Vol. 1 The Crusading Years 1895-1956*, 15.
[3] *Ibid*., 33-34.
[4] *Ibid*., 30.

possible impression, Diefenbaker was consistently and deeply moved by these types of comments and gestures.[5]

It was during the many times that his family entertained guests that Diefenbaker developed his own personal touch, his ability to influence people through the force of his personality. It was an attribute that he used to devastating effect during his election campaigns. In all three of his major electoral breakthroughs, his victory in Prince Albert in 1953, his election as Progressive Conservative Party leader in 1956 and his dethronement of the Liberals in 1957, Diefenbaker ran on populist platforms that focused on himself rather than on the political party with which he was affiliated. Yet this personal approach proved to be a double-edged sword, at once a great strength and a great weakness as it also meant that Diefenbaker was acutely susceptible to personal charms/overtures.

Diefenbaker's conceptualization of the Canadian identity was also shaped by the Prairies. This identity was formed in response to both the acceptance he felt on the Prairies and to the occasional attacks that called into question his "Canadianness". These attacks were often directed at his last name, for example when political opponents in the 1925 federal election called him a "Hun" to emphasize his Germanic sounding name.[6] Diefenbaker responded by stating that "if there is no hope for me to be a Canadian then who is there hope for?"[7] He made it a common theme throughout his political career to reshape the prevailing concept of what constitutes a "Canadian" with his own, non-ethnic, non-hyphenated view which focused on contemporary citizenship. He felt that the contemporary Canadian identity was based on, and privileged, those who could trace their lineage back to England or France. This left out the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who came from other nations. Thus he sought to replace the French-Canadian or English Canadian identities with a Canadian one that included all Canadians and was based not on ethnic origins but on Canadian citizenship. This was the origin of Diefenbaker's idea of "One Canada" and this new definition included, of course, Diefenbaker himself. Diefenbaker rejected the traditional ethnic poles of political power of English and French Canadians—which helps to explain

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[5] Memorandum of a Conversation with President Kubitschek at Luncheon at Laranjeiras Palace, Wednesday, November 19th, 1958. DCCA, Prime Minister's Office Series, File 539, 012452; Arturo Frondizi, "Telegram from Gander, Newfoundland," December 1, 1961. DCCA, Prime Minister's Office Series, Vol. 561, File A691.1, 427320.

[6] Diefenbaker, *One Canada: Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker, Vol. 1 The Crusading Years 1895-1956*, 132.

[7] *Ibid*., 132.

his limited interest in Quebec while in national politics. There was no room for special treatment of any kinds of Canadians.

An interesting aspect of Diefenbaker's idea of "One Canada" was its similarity to the notion of the American "melting pot" and the manner in which Diefenbaker's upbringing on the Prairies helped shape his view of the influence of the American other. The Prairies, in many aspects, were more deeply influenced by American society than other regions in Canada. Both the proximity to the US and the familiarity of the American homesteader across the border contributed to this. Many ideas that appealed to Diefenbaker had their origins in the US. For example, R. B. Bennett's New Deal, of which Diefenbaker was a strong supporter, was modeled after Franklin Roosevelt's.[8] As well, American expressions of patriotism and independence struck a chord with him as they echoed his own strong feelings for Canada.

Diefenbaker, and many other Canadians, admired and feared the power of the US. Yet he was not anti-American in the sense that he rejected everything American; rather, he was concerned about the loss of Canadian autonomy that he saw as the inevitable result of the close association between the two countries. It was, ironically, the very autonomy which US administrations had always insisted on preserving in international affairs that Diefenbaker cherished for Canada. Thus the US played an important role in shaping the attitudes and ideas of a young Diefenbaker.

In addition to his years on the Prairies, many aspects of Diefenbaker's Latin American policy were also influenced by his early political career and his rather unconventional rise to the office of Prime Minister. His decision to join the Conservative Party of Canada rather than the Liberal Party allowed him the freedom to pursue a more personal political agenda. Furthermore, the opposition that he often encountered from the core of the Conservative Party during his rise through its ranks encouraged him to pursue a personal approach to policy formation and implementation. This had the effect of making him less reliant, for good or for ill, on the resources available to him once he became Prime Minister.

Diefenbaker's embrace of new directions in Canadian foreign policy was based on a political career where he often rejected political convention. The reason he was able to do this and still succeed in politics can be traced back to the decision to join the Conservative Party in 1925. It was a decision that can partly be attributed to geography, as the Prairies bequeathed to him the political circumstance that he exploited to succeed politically on his own terms, namely a weak Conservative Party.

[8] Smith, 78-79.

Diefenbaker was hardly a life-long Tory devotee. His father had been a strong Liberal supporter and Diefenbaker was deeply impressed by Sir Wilfrid Laurier when they had met by chance in 1910. Laurier bought a newspaper from the fifteen-year-old Diefenbaker and the latter recalled that he "had the awed feeling that he was in the presence of greatness."[9]

Diefenbaker also reportedly supported Liberal candidate T. C. Davis in the Saskatchewan Provincial election of 1925.[10] Three weeks after Davis was victorious Diefenbaker was nominated as the federal Conservative candidate for the riding of Prince Albert. He accepted and would thereafter remain a member of the Conservative Party until his death in 1979. Why the sudden switch? The answer to that question reveals much about the strength of Diefenbaker's political ambitions and ideals as well as the nature of the Liberal and Conservative Parties at the turn of the century.

One major difference between the Liberal and Conservative Parties during the early decades of the twentieth century was in their handling of foreign affairs. The Liberals drifted towards continentalism after their first attempts at reciprocity during the late 19th century. The Conservatives sought to maintain and strengthen the British connection. For Diefenbaker, continentalism was an attack on the essential British connection that formed the foundation of the Canadian identity. He believed that, "Our institutional heritage and Commonwealth citizenship gave Canada a uniqueness in North America that was vital to our preservation as a nation."[11] This rejection of continentalism was an essential aspect of Diefenbaker's Latin American policy. He sought closer ties with Latin America in part to lessen Canada's dependence on the US and as a way of distinguishing Canada's policy towards the region from US policy.

Domestically, however, Diefenbaker was closer to the post-Great Depression Liberal Party which had embraced welfare liberalism.[12] He believed that it was important for the government to provide social services and to guarantee a minimum standard of living for its citizens. These beliefs were reflected in his legislative agenda as Prime Minister,

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[9] Diefenbaker, *One Canada: Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker, Vol. 1 The Crusading Years 1895-1956*, 70-71.
[10] Smith, 43.
[11] Diefenbaker, One Canada: Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker, Vol. 1 The Crusading Years 1895-1956, 131.
[12] Welfare liberalism refers here to ideas that were expounded by those liberals who rejected the classical liberal view that government needed to minimally involved in society and instead believed that government could be a force for maximizing the freedom of opportunity of its citizens through the construction of a social safety net.

for example his promotion of unemployment insurance and old age pensions. In many ways Diefenbaker defied easy categorization as a Liberal or as a Conservative.[13] George Grant argued that Diefenbaker (and other politicians who shared his ideological views) belonged to a uniquely Canadian ideology, Red Toryism. The term originated from political scientist Gad Horowitz who coined it in 1966 following Diefenbaker's defeat.[14] Red Tories emphasized traditional conservative values, such as deep respect for government, together with more welfare liberal ideas of government intervention in society to address social ills. Red Tories tended to fit with either the Liberal or Conservative Parties, although until 2003 they were almost all members of the Progressive Conservatives. (Their ability to fit into either party was demonstrated by the movement of a number of Red Tories, such as John Herron and Scott Brison, from the Conservative Party to the Liberal Party following the former's creation at the merger of the Progressive Conservative Party and the Canadian Alliance in 2003.)

Ideological considerations thus only partly explained Diefenbaker's choice of political party; another factor in his decision was practicality. At the turn of the nineteenth century the Conservative Party in Saskatchewan was a pale shadow of its powerful counterpart in Ontario. Between 1905 and 1944, the Liberals dominated Saskatchewan politics, winning every provincial election (except 1929) and they had a powerful, effective organization that steamrolled the opposition. The Liberals also dominated Saskatchewan at the federal level. Between 1908 and 1940, the Conservative Party was shut out of the province in five elections and in three elections managed to win only a single seat each time. Diefenbaker, whose single-minded pursuit of political success had begun at a young age, saw little room for rapid advancement as part of the Liberals; there were simply too many people waiting ahead of him in the queue. The Conservatives offered an opportunity for a quick progression in both position and prestige. Indeed, with the Conservatives' fortunes so low, victory was not a necessity; a good showing was considered a success.[15] Thus there was a pragmatic quality to Diefenbaker's decision to join the Conservative Party.

If Diefenbaker had joined the Liberals he would have been forced to conform to the Party's policies or else be quickly shunted aside. As a

[13] Newman, 179.
[14] Gad Horowitz, "Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation" *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 32, no. 2 (May, 1966); 158.
[15] Smith, 44.

Conservative candidate in Saskatchewan there were far less constraints on the expression of his personal views. This was fortunate, since Diefenbaker's "Red Tory" ideals were not shared by a majority of Conservative Party members during the early part of the twentieth century. Freed from the constraints of conforming to a centralized, traditional party platform, Diefenbaker often ran personal campaigns that bore little resemblance to the national Conservative Party platform. For example, during the 1925 federal campaign when Conservative leader Arthur Meighen expressed his opposition to the construction of the Hudson's Bay Railway, Diefenbaker publicly announced that if elected he would resign if construction on the railway had not begun within two years.[16]

Diefenbaker's problems with his party's centre continued throughout his political career. The Conservative Party, he once stated, was a party that needed "to be dragged kicking and screaming into the 20th century."[17] At one time he complained that the official Conservative campaign forced him to try to "explain matters that were unexplainable" to his constituents during a campaign.[18] He lost that particular election, as he lost the first five elections that he contested. When he finally emerged victorious in the 1940 federal election, he won by running on a populist platform that focused on himself rather than the Conservative Party. Thus he felt that he owed little to the Party's leadership and he begrudged them the many handicaps that he perceived were placed on his earlier campaigns by them. It was an antagonism that continued throughout his political career.

Diefenbaker's early conflicted relationship with the Conservative Party and his lack of trust in its policy choices led him to rely on his own intuition and ideas. As far as he was concerned, the Party's centre had proven unfit stewards for the Conservative tradition. This refusal or inability to deal with a large bureaucracy in an effective manner also hurt his relationship with it and was typical of Diefenbaker.

This translated directly to difficulties in his relationship with the Department of External Affairs. Prior to his 1957 election victory, the Department of External Affairs had grown quite used to having a strong voice in the shaping of foreign policy and it enjoyed enormous influence in this role under Louis St. Laurent. Diefenbaker, however, wanted the Department to provide him with the information that he sought to shape policy not provide policy for him to shape. Its inability to conform to his wishes contributed to his intense distrust of its senior officials as well as

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[16] Diefenbaker, *One Canada: Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker, Vol. 1 The Crusading Years 1895-1956*, 133.
[17] Ibid., 143.
[18] Ibid., 143.

his belief that they were secretly loyal to former Secretary of State for External Affairs and new Liberal Party leader, Lester Pearson.[19]

Historians John Hilliker and Basil Robinson have argued that for the most part the Department's members did their jobs without allowing political bias to enter into their work.[20] Both authors pointed out the difficulties of working with Diefenbaker, a leader who was looking to articulate firmly held opinions to the public not discuss the Department's (often) differing views on the matter.

Hilliker and Robinson's arguments imply that the bureaucracy was not in fact biased against Diefenbaker. But there is hardly unanimous agreement on this point. There are numerous people who have argued that the civil service believed, as former civil servant and latter Liberal MP Jack Pickersgill did, that the non-Liberal governments were nothing more than short term aberrations, small breaks before the natural governing party was returned to power.[21]

Regardless of the accuracy of Diefenbaker's beliefs on the attitude of the civil service there certainly was a problem of communication between himself and the Department of External Affairs. Believing that he could not rely exclusively on its advice he often turned to other, non-Departmental sources of information, such as academics, friends, members of the press and other world leaders (British Prime Minister Harold Macmillian being a prominent example).[22] He also tended to put great value on the information garnered and agreements that he made, for example, while meeting personally with Latin American leaders.

If Diefenbaker's early political career sowed the seeds that spawned a particular approach to decision-making which was reflected in his policies toward Latin America, his latter successes - assuming leadership of the Party and then leading the Conservatives to their first federal electoral triumph in 27 years - represented the harvest. He achieved these successes by pursuing a political agenda focused on himself and his personal policy positions.

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[19] John Hilliker, "The Politicians and the Pearsonalities: The Diefenbaker Government and the Conduct of Canada's External Relations" *Canadian Historical Association Papers, 1984*, 151-167.

[20] Hilliker, 151 and H. Basil Robinson, *Diefenbaker's World: A Populist in Foreign Affairs* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 33-34.

[21] See William Heward Grafftey, *Democracy Challenged: How to End One-Party Rule in Canada* (Montreal: Vehicule Press, 2002), 20; Jack Pickersgill, *The Road Back: By a Liberal in Opposition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

[22] Robinson, 38-40.

At the 1948 Conservative Party Leadership Convention he was overlooked by the Party in favour of former Ontario leader George Drew and he felt the sting of that rejection keenly. [23] He viewed it as engineered by the Party's centre and recalled that during his visit to congratulate Drew at the latter's hotel room he was made to feel by those Party leaders present, "as if an animal not customarily admitted to homes had suddenly entered into the place." [24] In many respects, he turned his back on the Party and relied on a purely populist platform for his two subsequent crucial election victories prior to1957, the contest for the riding of Prince Albert in 1953 and the struggle for the Progressive Conservative Leadership in 1956. His success in both contests reinforced his belief in the importance of charting his own course.

Prior to the federal election of 1953, the Liberal government abolished Diefenbaker's riding of Lake Centre during the redistribution of seats following the 1951 census. This forced him to find another riding in which to run for the 1953 election. He felt that this was a deliberate attempt by the Liberals to get rid of him.[25] He had been contemplating retirement but with the perceived attack on him by the Liberal Party he decided to "show the Liberal government that they could not do this to me."[26] After much thought, he ran in the riding of Prince Albert. Diefenbaker clubs quickly sprang up throughout the riding and his campaign posters made no mention of the new Conservative leader, George Drew or Drew's policies.[27] Instead, Diefenbaker rode his own image to victory. It was a telling moment. On five previous occasions he had run for office in Prince Albert, as a mayoral, provincial and federal candidate but lost on each occasion.

Diefenbaker was acutely aware that the riding of Prince Albert had twice elected the Prime Minister of Canada, with both Wilfrid Laurier and William Lyon Mackenzie King having previously held the seat. In 1925, he contested the riding of Prince Albert against King and was defeated. In 1953, his popularity and influence had so grown that he took the supposedly safe Liberal seat for his own.

With that victory, the Prime Minister's office was now in sight. For Diefenbaker it was his personal approach which had provided the key to

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[23] Newman, 29.
[24] Diefenbaker, *One Canada: Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker, Vol. 1 The Crusading Years 1895-1956*, 247.
[25] *Ibid*., 272.
[26] *Ibid*.
[27] Dick Spencer, *Trumpets and Drums: John Diefenbaker on the Campaign Trail* (Toronto: Greystone Books, 1994), 10.

unlocking the door to his own success. He would use that same key to open the door to the leadership of the party that had long been denied him. Following his defeat at the 1948 Leadership Convention his sense of inevitable victory was rekindled when George Drew proved unable to break the Liberal stranglehold on power, despite two elections and the retirement of Mackenzie King. It was with more than a little satisfaction that he watched as the Liberals, under King's successor, Louis St. Laurent, actually made up ground in Drew's home province of Ontario. Finally, in 1956, worn out by his years in politics, Drew was forced to retire due to ill health, although he likely would not have been able to avoid questions of his leadership even if he had retained his strength.

The 1956 Progressive-Conservative Leadership Convention served to illustrate both Diefenbaker's tendency to focus on the personal and his alienation from the traditional poles of English and French Canada. He correctly believed that the party establishment would be unable to prevent his victory.[28] He once again ran on a populist platform and this time he finally captured the leadership. His posters were everywhere and though many of the establishment did not support him, the rank and file members certainly did.[29] He was the people's champion and he believed that the righteousness of his cause was clearly demonstrated by his victory against the elite whom he viewed as having conspired against him.

Diefenbaker's victory, however, was underscored by controversy involving his distaste for the traditional division of Canada into English and French sections. It was a tradition that one of the two formal nominations of the leadership candidate should be from the Quebec delegation.[30] Diefenbaker, however, chose George Pearkes from British Columbia and Hugh John Flemming from New Brunswick to represent Western and Eastern Canada, rather than a francophone from Quebec. The choice caused a minor stir at the convention. Pierre Sevigny, who was a Diefenbaker supporter and later became Associate Minister of National Defence in the Diefenbaker cabinet, viewed it as a major mistake.[31] Léon Balcer, the nominal leader of the Quebec delegation, actively campaigned against Diefenbaker and several members of the delegation left the convention after Diefenbaker was announced as the new leader.[32]

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[28] Spencer, 20.
[29] George C. Perlin, *The Tory Syndrome: Leadership Politics in the Progressive Conservative Party* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), 54.
[30] Peter Stursberg, *Diefenbaker: Leadership Gained, 1956-62* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 18.
[31] Sturberg, 19.
[32] Perlin, 54.

Diefenbaker's choice to alienate an important and influential wing of the party at the 1956 leadership convention was short-sighted and, unfortunately for Diefenbaker, all too common. He lacked that crucial ability to work with those who did not share his views and those who felt that they were entitled to something that is indispensable to political life and diplomacy. He was not inclined to want to build consensus, nor was he a man who could see the various shades of grey in any given situation; rather, he all too often saw decisions as clear cut: black or white. The people involved in those situations were often faced with a stark choice, either be with Diefenbaker or against him. He did not fear burning bridges and in the end he would burn too many.

This inability to work with those who did not share his views and/or those who had a sense of entitlement ultimately had a strong, negative effect on his Latin American policies. When Argentine President Frondizi was overthrown by military coup Diefenbaker made little attempt to continue to strengthen Canadian-Argentine relations with the new government and all the work he previously committed to that object was lost. More damaging was the fact that these character traits all but doomed Diefenbaker's relationship with John Kennedy, who not only had a different geo-political world view than Diefenbaker but also carried with him a strong sense of entitlement.

Diefenbaker's personal attention to his Latin American policy initiatives can also be understood as partially a result of his career path prior to his assumption of Canada's highest political office. His political and legal careers did not train Diefenbaker in the ability to effectively manage a bureaucracy, to implement policies with long-range goals or to delegate responsibility. Thus, when he formulated his Latin American policy, he relied on himself rather than the bureaucracy of the Department of External Affairs.

During most of his early political career he sat in the opposition benches (from the time of his first electoral victory in 1940 until 1957). He was never a member of his party's centre and never had the opportunity to formulate policy. When he finally assumed a leadership position in 1956, he had less then a year to grow accustomed to a situation of authority with which he had little experience. Before his election as Conservative Party leader his successes appeared to be in attacking the legislation and records of his opponents. The skills required to succeed in this venue had been honed during his long legal career.

Diefenbaker's legal career left a deep impression on him. Though the majority of his law work was in the area of civil law, it was as a criminal

lawyer that he excelled and made a name for himself.[33] His strength did not lie in diligent research but in cross examination. There were a number of cases where he did not submit any evidence to the court, relying exclusively on his ability to poke holes in the prosecution's case through a thorough cross-examination.[34] An effective cross examination relies on the personality and skills of the lawyer delivering it. The lawyer responds to the witness, rather than presenting a carefully scripted case to the judge or jury. Thus, Diefenbaker developed those skills which benefited him in the personal aspect of diplomacy, such as his many meetings with Latin American leaders, but neglected those that built on the bridges that these meetings had established.

This propensity for favouring the personal focused cross-examination rather than constructing his own case was most evident in Diefenbaker's defence of John Harms, an American who had travelled to the Saskatchewan North to hunt and trap. While there, Harms took on a partner, a young man named John Anthony, who originally hailed from Alberta. On November 23rd, 1935, the two men argued and in a drunken stupor Harms shot and killed Anthony.[35] Upon his arrest he confessed to the crime and hired Diefenbaker to conduct his defence. During both the trial and the subsequent retrial Diefenbaker did not call any witnesses or introduce any evidence, rather he cross-examined the prosecution's witnesses and successfully (in the re-trial) argued that the most that Harms was guilty of was manslaughter.[36] Many of Diefenbaker's other cases followed a similar pattern.[37]

The case of Isobel Emele is also instructive in this regard. Emele was charged with murdering her husband and the evidence gave the prosecution what appeared, at least on the surface, to be an airtight case.[38] Her husband, however, had been a member of the pro-Nazi Bund, and in 1940, Canada was at war with Germany and the Nazis. Diefenbaker attacked the dead man's character, painting him as "an autocratic, miserly bully who gloried in the conquests of Adolf Hitler."[39] Perhaps most

[33] Ken Whiteway, "The Legal Career of John G. Diefenbaker" *Saskatchewan History* 53, no. 1, (2001): 26.
[34] For a detailed description of the cases, see Garrett Wilson and Kevin Wilson, *Diefenbaker for the Defence* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1988).
[35] Wilson, 191-206.
[36] Wilson, 206.
[37] In *Diefenbaker for the Defence* see the cases of Pasowesty; Wysochan; Steve Bohun; and Napoleon Fouquette.
[38] Ibid., 236.
[39] Ibid., 238.

tellingly, at the end of the case Diefenbaker explained to the jury his role as defence consul. "It is not the duty of the defence to prove anything in this case – nothing. The onus is on the Crown to prove murder."[40]

Diefenbaker took on many non-criminal cases as a lawyer but never to any great success and he deliberately cultivated the image of himself as criminal lawyer, finding that it meshed well with the image of a fiery orator that emerged from his early forays into politics. [41] It was an identity that proved both self-fulfilling and self-limiting. He was never a great conciliator or as a policy expert and, perhaps most importantly, did not see this as a significant weakness.

In addition to his political career, Diefenbaker's family also played an important role in shaping his person. His mother Mary instilled in him a strong sense of self-belief and self-reliance. His first wife Edna provided invaluable aid and support for his early forays into politics and his second wife, Olive, served to reinforce his own personal values and ideas.

Diefenbaker acknowledged his debt to his mother early in his memoirs, "mother gave me drive" he says in what was surely an understatement.[42] He remained very close to her until her death. His first wife Edna once stated that, "John has three loves: his mother, politics and me – in that order."[43] Mary would constantly urge him on, never wavering in her belief that he would achieve great things. She focused on her eldest son because her husband had so obviously lacked the drive to achieve what she considered success.

Mary Diefenbaker also had a firm self-belief in the correctness of her decisions and this, too, she passed on to her son. She believed, as did Diefenbaker, that time would eventually prove that her choices were the correct ones. Her husband appeared to accept that this was the case and once told Diefenbaker that "Mary is always right. Sometimes I don't think so at the time but it always turns out to be the proper course to take."[44] When the family was moving from Ontario to Saskatchewan and Diefenbaker's father began to have serious doubts as to the wisdom of the decision, Mary forced them to continue on. Diefenbaker recalled:

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[40] Ibid., 247.
[41] Wilson, 55.
[42] Diefenbaker, *One Canada: Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker, Vol. 1 The Crusading Years 1895-1956*, 8.
[43] Simma Holt, *The Other Mrs. Diefenbaker: A Biography of Edna May Brower* (Markham: Paperjacks Ltd., 1983), 144.
[44] Diefenbaker, *One Canada: Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker, Vol. 1 The Crusading Years 1895-1956*, 20.

> At Fort William he [William Diefenbaker] proposed we turn back. Mother said, "We started out and we're going on." Father was quite set and replied that no matter what, he was returning. Mother would have none of this. She told him, "If you do, the rest of us will carry on and you'll come out sooner or later."[45]

They carried on and the incident left little doubt as to who ran the family.

Diefenbaker's father William had a very different mindset than his wife. William passed on his love of Parliament and the British connection to his son. This love of Parliament was a fixture of Diefenbaker's political career. It was evident, for example, in his sharp criticisms of the Mackenzie King government's handling of Canada's participation in the Second World War. He felt that the King government was stripping away power and authority from Parliament.[46] In the House of Commons he argued that "This Parliament represents the people of Canada; it is a repository and trustee of their hopes and survival."[47] It was this respect for Parliament and its institutions, including the power of the Cabinet, that played an important role in Diefenbaker's Latin American policy. He frequently used Cabinet to advance individual policies towards specific American nations such as Mexico and the Federation of the West Indies. His strong desire to achieve cabinet unanimity also proved to be an important factor in how he handled the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The driven Mary Diefenbaker and the laid back William Diefenbaker were able to reconcile their different outlooks in the bonds of marriage. Their son, however, often found that the ideas that he inherited from his parents were frequently at odds with each other. His drive to achieve victory and his supreme confidence in his own decisions were, in some respects, difficult to reconcile with his reverence for Canada's parliamentary system of government. Rather than centralize power in the Prime Minister's Office like later Prime Ministers Pierre Elliot Trudeau, Paul Martin or Stephen Harper, he continued to put major decisions before Parliament. This opened them up for debate and slowed the passage of legislation.

When Diefenbaker formulated and attempted to implement his Latin American policy, he asserted a large measure of confidence and self-belief. However, these attributes often masked a need for support, or at least affirmation, of his policy choices. As Prime Minister, Diefenbaker

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[45] Diefenbaker, *One Canada: Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker, Vol. 1 The Crusading Years 1895-1956*,19.
[46] Smith, 119.
[47] *House of Commons Debates, July 2nd, 1942*, 3888.