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Introduction

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Introduction

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Although it is now 75 years since the publication of John Bartlet Brebner's *North Atlantic Triangle*, the essays in this issue of the *London Journal of Canadian Studies* attest to the resonance and utility of its depiction of 'the interplay of Canada, the United States and Great Britain'.¹ Though it may have been a geometric form often visible from only one of its vertices – Canada – the essays that follow, and many other scholarly works, have employed Brebner's metaphor not only to situate and explain Canadian policy but also to show how Canadian views and actions influenced and were shaped by the stances and conduct of Canada's closest allies. Not even its Canadian enthusiasts would misrepresent it as an equilateral triangle, but these articles and previous studies demonstrate that British and American policymakers often took heed of Canada's positions and interests when formulating their own options and conducting their diplomacy.

Brebner's book was arguably published at or near the peak of this trilateral relationship, as the close collaboration before, during and after the Second World War yielded exceptional opportunities and accomplishments for the partners. The Canadian prime minister most closely identified with these developments, William Lyon Mackenzie King, was under no illusions of equality among the countries or their leaders, but he firmly believed in a helpful Canadian role as an 'interpreter' to reconcile and align British and American stances. In some areas, notably wartime supply and finance, planning for peacetime and post-war reconstruction, the Canadian contribution went well beyond advice and the outcomes bore the imprint of those engagements.

Canada's place at the table in the key negotiations and institutions of the global economy and in the elaboration of the North Atlantic alliance was undoubtedly earned through its responsible and effective participation in the events described in these articles as well as other major wartime developments in which Canada played a meaningful and influential part. Moreover, American and British policymakers regarded

the Canadian involvement and assistance as valuable complements to their own deliberations and actions. The comparative neglect by later American and British scholarship – a point made directly and indirectly by the authors of these essays – does not reflect the reality of the decade surveyed in this collection.

In fact, none of these stories would be complete without Canadian content and records, as these articles demonstrate. Though the Canadian presence, personified by the ubiquitous Mackenzie King, is often overlooked – as in Anglo-American relations during the 1930s, and the mooted invasion of Greenland in 1940; or in the background, as with the St Pierre and Miquelon affair in 1941; or simply downplayed, as with the Permanent Joint Board on Defence, also in 1940, and the pretensions of the post-war Department of External Affairs – there is no doubt that Canada made a difference and that it defined its position within the North Atlantic Triangle in each of the episodes or themes examined herein.

Each of these authors sheds further light on key aspects of the international relations of the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, whether unilateral, bilateral or, most often, trilateral engagements. As all remind us, Canada often had a key part to play and generally played it well in circumstances that were exceptionally favourable to the values and interests of the country, however perilous the overall situation.

Finally, this collection of articles also attests to the valuable contribution to our understanding of Canada made by the *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, published online by UCL Press, and by the Institute of the Americas at UCL, which has hosted the conferences and seminars from which most of these papers have been drawn and which continues to enrich our knowledge through its support and engagement. Special thanks are also due to the Canada–UK Foundation, located at Canada House in London, for its generous support in the funding of this issue of the *London Journal of Canadian Studies*.

Note on contributor

Hector Mackenzie has a BA (Honours) in History from the University of Toronto and a DPhil in Politics (International Relations) from Oxford University. After a post-doctoral fellowship and teaching at the University of Toronto and the University of Western Ontario, he was employed for 30 years as an historian for what is now known as Global Affairs Canada. For most of that time, he was the Senior Departmental Historian and for several years he was also the principal departmental speech-writer. He

was also the principal organiser of the annual O. D. Skelton Memorial Lectures and of an educational website directed at secondary school students, *Canadians in the World*. He is an adjunct research professor in the Department of History of Carleton University in Ottawa and he has served as President of the Association for Canadian Studies. After 30 years in the government of Canada, he retired from public service, though he remains an active scholar. He is the author of more than 40 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters and the editor of two volumes (for 1948 and 1949) in the series *Documents on Canadian External Relations*.

Note

- 1 J. B. Brebner, *North Atlantic Triangle: The interplay of Canada, the United States and Great Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1945).