

**THE UNHAPPY WARRIOR**



**Pearson's Capacity Surprises Aides**

By PETER C. NEWMAN  
As his Liberal government reels from mishap to misfortune, more and more Canadians are beginning to ask what's happened to Lester Pearson?

The curious gap between the Prime Minister's reputation and his performance has left many people concerned about his capacity to exercise political power and the nature of his ultimate goals.

Less than a decade ago, Mike Pearson was hailed as the saviour of a grateful world, after a lifetime of uninterrupted success, he became the first Canadian to win the Nobel Peace Prize, the greatest international honor of them all.

Yet 23 months after assuming his nation's highest office, Pearson has become the unhappy warrior of Canadian politics. By the ordinary yardsticks of history it would be far too soon to attempt a serious assessment of his stewardship. But as much has happened to him, to his government and to the nation, in the crises of the past two years that it's probably not unfair to ask—at least tentatively—where we have come with him and where we may be going.

This series of 10 articles will attempt some provisional answers. It will try to go some distance in mapping the complexities and exploring the paradoxes of the unusual diplomat-politician who is Canada's 14th prime minister—a man described by his friend, Bruce Hutchison, as "the most solitary public person of his time."

Pearson has advocated and helped to bring about deepening political and social changes that have affected us all. But the image of him implanted on the public mind remains vague and confusing. A 1964 Gallup

poll showed that of the 93 per cent of Canadians who said they admired Pearson, some 46 per cent couldn't think of a single specific reason why.

**PICTURE BLURRED**  
That the many blurred pictures the public has of Lester Pearson don't add up to a strong impression was amusingly demonstrated by a minor incident that occurred during the Queen's visit to Prince Edward Island last fall.

Pearson and his entourage, including Jim Coult's, his appointments secretary, were staying overnight at the official residence of the province's Lieutenant-Governor in Charlottetown. Back in Ottawa, an aide got his time zones mixed up and placed a call to Coult's that rang in Charlottetown long before breakfast. A local waiter, brought in to act as a manservant for the occasion, put down the phone and went to shake Pearson awake, demanding, "Are you Mr. Coult?"

When he heard the Prime Minister's emphatically negative reply, the man still unaware of who he was addressing, persisted. "Well, look, you've got to help me find him. This is important."

The anecdote may reflect as much on the lack of formality among Charlottetown waiters as on the vagueness of Pearson's public image. But still, it's not an incident that could conceivably have involved a strong public personality like John Diefenbaker or Mackenzie King. It's equally unimaginable that either Diefenbaker or King would have reacted with the self-deprecating good humor Pearson displayed when he recounted this story.

Part of the reason for his inability to project a strong image

as Prime Minister may be that for many Canadians, the Pearson Years—the period when he made the largest impact on the national consciousness—remain that simpler decade following 1947 when a hot-headed Mike Pearson transformed the External Affairs portfolio into an international command post which allowed him to bring more honour to his country than any living Canadian.

**MANY HONORS**  
In the loosely organized post-war world, Pearson's flair for constructive diplomacy earned him nearly every honour the international community can bestow: the presidency of the United Nations' council chairmanship of NATO, 24 honorary degrees, two medals and the Nobel Peace Prize. Walter Lippman wrote that Pearson "incarnates the hope of building a true community of the Atlantic peoples" while Dr. Gunnar Jahn, chairman of the Nobel prize committee, declared that at the time of Suez, Pearson had "saved the world."

Even if most Canadians weren't aware of exactly what Pearson was doing in that golden period between 1948 and 1957 Canada shared in his international triumphs and all of us could feel a part of his crusade for world order.

Naturally, then, in electing Pearson as Prime Minister, Canadians felt that he would be able to transfer his towering international reputation to domestic politics. In many ways his time in office has been a period of national renovation. But not even the most partisan Liberal can pretend that Pearson has delivered what was advertised: an immensely capable government which had the answers to the nation's many dilemmas.

Instead of displaying the superman competence that marked his behaviour during international crises, he's shown a discouraging tendency as Prime Minister to act like an admirable but all too fallible human being.

The office he holds demands of its occupant some special quality—some dimension of unrealized potential which maintains a distance between the prime minister and the rest of us. Mackenzie King's occult secretiveness and John Diefenbaker's self-imposed sense of destiny fitted the pattern perfectly.

**ORDINARY MAN**  
But Lester Pearson is different. Unlike most of his 13 predecessors, he hasn't been notably enlarged by his office. He remains that extraordinary ordinary man. He inspires "familiarity" without the undercurrent of excitement Canadians yearn for in their leaders.

The alchemy of power has failed to transform his character. Lester Pearson is probably the first man to serve as Prime Minister of Canada whose public and private personalities are one and the same.

Yet Canadian history seems to show that the effective use of a

prime minister's power depends in part on the separation of those personalities. Only then can he act in the nation's interest without being hampered by personal sentiment.

In the current allegations of scandal involving his ministers and their assistants, Pearson has refused to abandon personal friendships. This is certainly an admirable trait in an individual, but it's at least questionable whether it's an equally admirable trait in a prime minister, or anyone else who aspires to high political office. "Any profession from the time he enters the political arena, knows that if his actions prove embarrassing, his party will ruthlessly cut him loose," says one Ottawa politico. "That's a part of the game. But Pearson sometimes acts as if he was playing no politics but tiddlywinks."

The outraged innocence of Liberal ministers like Maurice Lamontagne, who justified his peculiar "pay-if-you-feel-like-it" furniture deal by pleading naivete, may not sound credible to most Canadians. But political naivete is a quality that Pearson can believe in, since he himself has been its frequent victim.

**CHARMED LIFE**

Until he became Prime Minister, Pearson had never been roughed up, had never had cause for cynicism. In fact, he had led something of a charmed life. Although he repeatedly volunteered for front line action, he survived World War I unscathed. He was given his third university year for his war service, he got a job from his uncle, won a scholarship to Oxford, went steadily and easily up the External Affairs ladder in Ottawa. When he finally decided to enter politics in 1948, he was made a senior cabinet minister even before he became an MP and was handed such a safe Liberal seat (Algoma-East) that he's held it ever since with increasing majorities though he's one of only two MPs in Canada who don't bother to maintain residences in their home constituencies.

His painless progress from one success to another is reflected in Pearson's approach to politics. He lacks that essential wariness—the sixth sense that power must be jealously guarded, which has prompted successful prime ministers to seek the point of balance on political issues, then to perch on it until a national consensus has formed behind them. By the time they were finally moved into action, the political hazards of their position had been minimized.

Pearson has reversed the process. He acts first and presumes that public opinion will catch up. It's this tendency to attempt political high jumps without a running start that has caused the nation to stagger from crisis to crisis under Pearson's stewardship. Although some notable achievements have been thrown off in the process, Pearson's technique has badly unsettled the national nerve.

The dramatic procession of events which culminated in the adoption of the Canadian flag provides a prime example of the Pearson "standing high-jump" method of governing. When he abruptly produced his pennant in May of 1964, few Canadians were particularly concerned about the flag issue. Seven months later, so much public pressure had been built up to resolve the flag crisis that Pearson's application of parliamentary closure produced only nominal resentment.

**RISKS SMALL PART**  
But the fact that Canada's flag is not the same design to which the Prime Minister was originally committed also tells much about the Pearson approach. He has a peculiar capacity to view events away from the vantage point of his own self-esteem so that he risks only a small part of himself on their outcome.

Although he holds what is, after all, the nation's highest political office, he is not a man wholly committed to politics. "That's true," he told a friend who recently suggested this to him, "and it's my greatest strength. I've seen what a man totally immersed in politics can do to a country and nothing frightens me more. You must draw limits in your political commitment, otherwise you become uncivilized. But when a crisis develops, that's different. Then you can commit yourself totally to an issue. This is my ideal: not to be involved with" (Continued on page 13)



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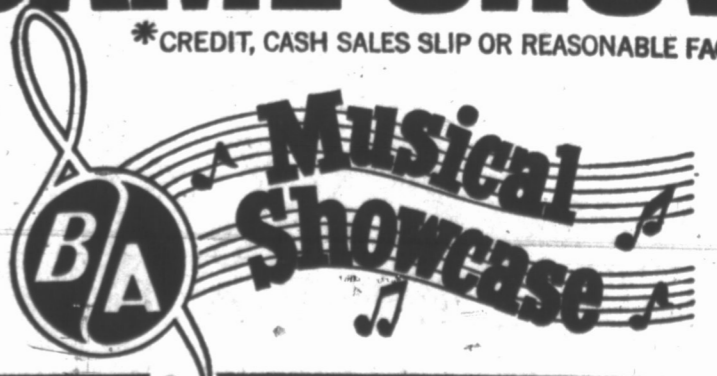
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