

THE ATLANTIC COMMUNITY

Address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. L. B. Pearson, to the English Speaking Union, London, England, April 30, 1956.

It has long been an agreeable and innocent diversion to the student of history to observe man's curious blindness to important and even revolutionary events in the contemporary scene. Almost any age—certainly including our own—provides numerous examples to give us that curious but common pleasure known as wisdom after the event.

At the very moment when Aristotle was designing the best possible constitution and economy for the City-State, his most renowned student, through his conquest of the civilized world, was making the City-State concept of Society obsolete. Long after the time when the introduction of gunpowder had completely changed the facts of war, moated castles continued to be built throughout Europe, even though their interest had become more picturesque than strategic. Early in the 19th century, as I recall, there were grave misgivings in England concerning the increasingly acute shortage of boxwood, with which alone the hubs of stage coach wheels could be satisfactorily made: this at the time when a network of railways was beginning to spread throughout the country. You will remember, too, that as late as 1917 in the First World War, the Allied Command kept in readiness a division or so of cavalry for the break-through to Berlin, yet one would have thought that by 1917 it would have been evident that cavalry, although continuing to give "an air of distinction to what would otherwise have been disorderly brawl", had largely gone the way of the crossbow and the muzzle-loader. In our own day, it is probable that none of us can fully apprehend the implications for war or peace of the release of atomic energy. A century or so hence, historians, if there still are any left, may wonder at our astonishing shortsightedness.

The fact is that man's inherently conservative nature and his tendency to think in wishful terms not infrequently blinds him to developments which are bound to bring about the most profound and unsettling transformations to his familiar world. That is one reason why it is so hard to bring political action into line with those developments.

Today, for instance, we may not have fully realized the changes that have occurred which render obsolete many of our old concepts of national sovereignty and which, on the other hand, make essential the growth and acceptance of the idea of supra-national association: changes which require that we

give priority to interdependence over independence.

Security, peace and ordered progress call for action on a wider basis than that of the national community. This does not mean, however, that we should move at once into world government or some form of atlantic union or broad political federation with a central legislature and executive, a common citizenship, currency, and budget, a single foreign policy and defence establishment under central control: in short, with all the institutions of a federal state.

Need for Security

Those who advocate such schemes of federation do so from the highest of motives. They perform, I think, a good and useful service in preparing public opinion for the political changes which will undoubtedly be called for in the future to promote international co-operation. As a practising and, I hope, practical politician, however, as well as a quondam student of political science, I confess that I sometimes find some of the blueprints of the brave new international world so far removed from the possibilities of the present that it is difficult to consider them in realistic terms. Our ultimate destiny—to safeguard our very existence—may require some form of federalism on a regional or even a wider basis. But meanwhile we have to work with the institutions which exist today and attempt to adapt them for the more ready and efficient and equitable solution of our current problems. This is, I suggest, a necessary and practicable task, and the insistent demand for something more far-reaching to be achieved immediately may at times be an obstacle to its accomplishment. In any event, the formal surrender of sovereignty, in its old form, is not now so decisive an issue as the provision of a new assurance through adequate international measures that power, traditionally the main attribute of sovereignty, will not be used for wrong purposes and against the general interest. The decisive factors, therefore, are those which determine policy: above all, which bring about a sound and sensible public opinion which alone makes it possible for democratic governments to adopt sound and sensible policies: or should the sequence be reversed?

Power, in the sense of capacity to wage nuclear war against another nuclear state, or on the other hand, to abandon the rest of the world and retire into complete isolation with-