

GOVERNMENT

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES



OF CANADA

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

NO. 50/24

NORTH AMERICA IN THE POST-WAR WORLD

Commencement Day address by Mr. L.B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, delivered at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California, on June 18, 1950.

This is a time of the year, and this is an occasion, when it is customary for advice to be given to those who are about to leave the great army of "academics anonymous" for the even greater army of those who, in one form or another, are making an active contribution to the life of our time; to its turbulence or its good order; to its progress or its retrogression; to its scientific and mechanical achievements or its social and political confusions. The invitation with which I have been honoured to address you is the licence which authorizes me to take full advantage of this "open season" for advice. I think, however, that you have probably been told sufficiently how the world is now your oyster, and how to go about opening it. I would only remind you that there will be other graduates in years to come, so I hope that you will leave some of the oyster for them.

May I make one or two other observations? The proliferation of human activity, the many-sided character of modern knowledge, the frightening complexity of modern life, have necessitated a degree of specialization in our educational processes which would seem grotesque to the scholar of a century or so ago, and which remains depressing to many of the scholars of today. In a university, however, the dangers of over-specialization are lessened by the contacts you make with others, the views you exchange; the shoulders which you rub of men who live with you but work in other fields than yours. You thereby have the means of laying a good solid general foundation on which to build your special structure.

As you begin in a new phase in the struggle for existence, a phase which will often be more competitive than co-operative, there will be a strong temptation to concentrate on your own particular activity, with less and less interest in what is going on in other fields; to seek the success which expresses itself in fame or power or recognition, and lose the greater satisfaction that comes from an ability to appreciate the beauty of a sonnet or a sunset. I hope that you will resist and defeat this temptation. Above all, may I hope that when you are faced with problems and opportunities in the days ahead, which may require you to call on yourselves, you will always find somebody at home.

These problems will be perplexing and challenging. We live in that kind of world. The opportunities will be correspondingly great. Speakers at commencement exercises sometimes concentrate on them - the opportunities - because they assume that it is material progress that is uppermost in the graduating student's mind. But