

External Affairs
Supplementary Paper
No. 53/13

An address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. L.B. Pearson, delivered at the closing of the Centenary Celebration at St. Michael's College, Toronto, March 24, 1953.

...In many ways this UN Session has been a frustrating and a depressing one. From the President's chair, I have listened to many speeches and during them - I say this without disrespect to the speeches - I have had much opportunity for thought and reflection. As these speeches continued to emphasize the tragic and menacing division between the two worlds; and as the accents of conflict and controversy became sharp and clear, often angry and shrill, I could not help but think - with something approaching despair - of the distance we had travelled - in the wrong direction - from those days of San Francisco in 1945 when, for a brief moment, to use Oliver Wendell Holmes' beautiful phrase, we caught "a dreaming glimpse of peace". For that vision there has now been substituted in much of our UN discussion the harsh reality of bitter controversy; factional disputation which seems to admit no compromise; the use of words which turns their normal meaning upside down; debate which is frank, at times, to the point of ferocity.

It is easy to despair in such circumstances; to throw in one's hand and admit failure with all its inevitable atomic consequences. But it would be folly to do so. For the UN with all its failures, remains our best hope for the solution of present international difficulties and for peace. It remains an indispensable - the indispensable - piece of world machinery for nations to use if and when they wish to. Of itself it can force no decision, determine no action. It is no super-state, nor even a court of law with power behind its judgments. But it is the agency through which co-operative action can best be worked out by those states who wish to do so, and it is the forum in which the collective moral purpose and the conscience of mankind can best express itself. Above all, it is the recognition of the interdependence, for better or for worse, of all the peoples of the world in which we live.

This interdependence does not itself necessarily make for peace - but it does make necessary some world organization in which the universal problems it creates can be discussed at a world level.

The UN has not failed. But even if it had, it is no crime to fail in a good purpose. It is only a crime not to have made the attempt. Indeed, I would go further and assert that it is more important to deserve success than to achieve it. Shakespeare felt that when he said "'Tis not in mortals to command success but we'll do more, Sempronius, we'll deserve it."

Let us then not abandon our effort for peace through UN. Even more, let us make sure that our own national policies, and - in so far as we can - the policies of the free world, will be such as to deserve success, if not to achieve it.