

Does hemispheric solidarity imply that North, South and Central America can be regarded -- geographically, politically, economically or culturally -- as one unit? Is it suggested that the countries of the Americas can form a self-sufficient means of defence against the perils of thermonuclear war? Does it envisage a system of security built up in isolation from the rest of the world? Is it the establishment of some kind of exclusive trade association for the benefit only of American nations? I am sure that the people and the governments of all American countries would reject any such narrow and confining concept of hemispheric solidarity.

Hemispheric solidarity in a practical and positive sense is the extension of the ideal expressed so memorably by the late President Roosevelt in his first inaugural address when he dedicated this nation to the policy of the good neighbour. Solidarity, as I see it, is not a dull and inflexible conformity but a constructive and dynamic unity in outlook and objectives -- a community of interests and ideals to which free nations may freely subscribe.

In the physical and chemical sciences, we think in contrasting terms of solids and fluids, but in the less precise science of politics it is perhaps possible and indeed desirable to have solidarity with a degree of fluidity.

I have spoken of the policy of the good neighbour. In a century of neighbourly visiting over the 4,000 miles of back fence that is our international boundary, Canadians have had an unique opportunity to assess the great benefits that flow from friendly relations with our powerful and peace-loving neighbour, the United States. And because our two peoples have followed the way of cooperation for so many years our good relations are frequently taken for granted. This, it seems to me, is an unwarranted assumption since friendly relations between countries, as between individuals, do not just happen; they must be built up and kept in good repair.

While we can take a degree of satisfaction from our success in building and maintaining this enduring friendship between the United States and Canada, we should not jump to the tempting conclusion that this continent has some kind of monopoly on human virtue. In truth, our successful relationship with one another stems in large measure from the simple fact that we have had the good fortune of starting afresh in North America, free from the legacies of centuries-old quarrels that have made the problems of Europe so complex and so difficult of solution.

There was a time, not so very long ago, when the vast oceans that flank this continent provided the United States and other American countries with comparative immunity from the troubles of the Europe its pioneer people left behind in search of freedom and opportunity in the New World. But just as the English Channel, which once protected Britain from the ills of continental Europe, has long since lost its protective power, so these sheltering ocean distances no longer isolate America from the dangers of this atomic and supersonic Twentieth Century.