

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

NO. 50/43

THE PRESERVATION OF CIVILIZATION

An address by Mr. L.S. St. Laurent, Prime Minister of Canada, delivered at the Autumn Convocation of the University of Toronto, on October 27, 1950.

.... It is a melancholy reflection on the times we live in that we should feel obliged to be concerned over the preservation of civilization. Half a century ago, when I was an undergraduate at another university, I doubt if any of us gave a thought to this question. In those days we were nearly all confident that civilization was advancing steadily over the face of the globe, that the only serious obstacles to the advance of civilization were ignorance and barbarism, and that these obstacles would eventually be overcome.

At the beginning of this century very few people dreamed that a menace to the existence of civilization might arise in the very heart of the civilized world. Yet that is precisely what has happened in the twentieth century with Fascism, Nazism and Communism alike.

What is more, the enslavement of the minds of human beings is not an incidental feature of totalitarianism, whether it takes the form of Fascism or Nazism or Communism. The very essence of the totalitarian state is the regimentation of all aspects of human life and all forms of human expression. I am sure all of us are convinced if the human mind is enslaved, civilization will eventually disappear. I think most of us would also agree that, given time, any totalitarian structure would be bound to collapse because no organized society can hope to endure indefinitely without some means of training independent and truly educated minds. But the process of internal decay and collapse might easily require several generations, during which the totalitarian state by its very nature, would remain a threat to the existence of all its free neighbours. In the case of a totalitarian state with the population and resources of the Soviet Union, such a threat is, in fact, a menace to civilization itself.

I say a totalitarian state, by its very nature, must remain a threat to its free neighbours. I believe this proposition is incontrovertible. The totalitarian state can be maintained only by armed force. That armed force may exist primarily to keep the subject population in slavery but its very existence constitutes a threat to other nations without equal strength. And this menace is redoubled because the masters of such a state justify the maintenance of armed might on the ground that their own state is really the one which is in danger and must dominate all its neighbours for its own preservation.