

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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No. 51/13 THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN A TWO-POWER WORLD

An address by Mr. L.B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, delivered to a meeting of the Canadian Bar Association, on March 31, 1951.

Recent international developments have prompted in various countries a re-appraisal of the proper functions of the United Nations. Such a re-appraisal has become all the more necessary by the growing tendency of the General Assembly to pass resolutions which ask the United Nations to do things it has not the resources to do, particularly when those resolutions are passed by a majority which includes many whose countries cannot or do not wish to contribute much to their implementation. It is necessitated also by the political lessons of the war in Korea and by the dilemma in which the United Nations found itself last January when it was called on to decide whether the People's Government of China by helping a declared aggressor in Korea had not itself engaged in aggression.

While I think that this re-examination is wise, I do not think that it will or should weaken our continued faith in the world Organization, or our recognition of its value. In the first place, the cause of free democracy, which we must maintain, will be sterile unless it is inspired by an ardent belief in freedom itself, and, we should not forget, the United Nations is committed to this belief by the obligation of its members to promote the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Secondly, the United Nations provides a framework within which men of good-will can work together for the coming of the day when the rule of law will replace the rule of force in international relations. The avowed policy of the Soviet group to bring about a contrary result - substitution of force for law - does not alter the fact that the rest of us, in the United Nations, can work together to frustrate this purpose and to achieve - however painfully and slowly - the ideal of nations under the law, an ideal which must sometime, somehow be achieved if free political society is not to be destroyed. Thirdly, by reason of its universal character, the Organization keeps alive the idea of the human community - however remote that idea may seem at the present to be from reality.

These and other functions to which the United Nations is pledged, are all of great value, even though the practice of the United Nations in each case falls short of the theory it embodies and of the ideal it holds out. Although it is committed to the advancement of freedom, in some of the countries which are members of the Organization, millions of wretched people are imprisoned in slave labour camps, while in others freedom is circumscribed by the ambitions and desires of arbitrary rulers. Then also, though