

## Reflections:

I have learned not to confuse power with greatness. I have learned power doesn't only at times corrupt, it diminishes a person. I don't ignore that it also has inspired and challenged people to things, to actions they never knew they could undertake but it's had the opposite effect on so many people and I've often been worried as I contemplate the present and the future, based on my experience of the past, in the inadequacy of our approach to the problems we had to face, the inadequacy of human leadership in the complexities of our societies.

It's very worrying for anybody who looks ahead to realize that things have got out of control in terms of human direction. I've seen men of great quality and integrity and sincerity and ideals lose some of these qualities under the pressures of leadership. The pressures imposed on them by public opinion. Pressures of the kind not normal in the previous generations. The pressures of public opinion which can be created instantly and make an instant impact on people and drive them off the course, as individuals, that they were hoping to pursue for their countries. This is very worrying, I think, to anybody who is worried about the future.

I've also learned not to confuse a vision with greatness. I have as much respect for good tradition as anybody I think should have, but my training and my experience has led me to believe that there are a lot of men of power in the world that haven't much wisdom. And there are a lot of very wise people in the world who haven't had much opportunity to show their wisdom in positions of responsibility.

Because of that and because of my background, my upbringing, I've never been unduly impressed by pomp and circumstance. I've seen more common sense expressed around a table in a farmhouse in my constituency when some of my political friends there were talking about what we ought to be doing in politics than I have around the table in the foreign office in London, or at NATO, or around a table in a United Nations committee room.

And so I've often felt that if you could only get this popular wisdom and common sense channelled into the agencies of political decision. You find that the leaders are often there, not because of their wisdom but because of their ability to manipulate the media of information and to rouse passionate public opinion, and they get to positions of responsibility on that basis rather than having earned them.

# Modern Information process is unlike anything in the past

by L. B. Pearson

In a series of historical interviews with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation following his retirement as Canadian Prime Minister, the late L. B. Pearson made this candid review of what he had learned about diplomacy, politics and other facets of the modern world during his long career in public life.

He displayed a particular concern about the new role of the news media in the democratic process.

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I've seen what bad men's control of a passionate intensity could do to a people and destroy them, to rouse them to a passionate intensity themselves, and then have them destroyed by that very passion and intensity; so I've always suspected the ability to rouse, the ability to incite.

## ... On politics

I should apologize for this self-analysis and bring myself on a couch, but the qualities I had inside me and perhaps I inherited were the qualities which made me happy and pretty successful in diplomacy: the finding of a way out; the looking at both sides of a question and coming to an agreement. Those very qualities – I had to use them for a good many years in External Affairs – are not always the qualities that are most successful in the adversary concept of partisan politics, where really you should look at things in terms of black and white.

There are good politicians that do that. Everything you do is white and anybody who gets in the way of your policies and

your plans, which are right, and moral, you sweep him into outer darkness whoever he may be. I never could quite feel that about most of the things I was doing in politics. I would like to think I was always right but I didn't feel all my opponents were devils. Perhaps the devil concept of politics is a little overdone these days.

Another thing that used to worry me – I'm not talking about looking back on political leadership – is the criticism I used to get from some of my own friends, some of my professional political friends, that I didn't have the killer instinct.

One man used to say to me, a friend of mine from Vancouver, said you never go for the jugular. Well, I was never much impressed by that kind of friendly criticism because it doesn't seem to me that going for the jugular is the right way to approach political leadership.

I was the kind of person that preferred to roll with the punch than stand up and be knocked down.

## ... On the media

There is an instinctive and an inevitable conflict between government and the media. In this sense, that it is the duty of the media to get all the information they can and get it before the people, subject to, of course, their own sense of responsibility.

It is not the duty, the preoccupation of government to hold back things at times until they can get them completed, until all the arguments are in and all the decisions are made: To keep things from the press, subject to, of course, their own sense of responsibility in making things known.

I don't know of any problem that is more important in Government than this problem of information. It's nothing that we have talked about. But when you talk about the new situations in government, the new complications, the new problems, the new difficulties one of the most important new problems, one of the most important new difficulties, one of the most important new opportunities in the broadening and deepening of democracy is the role of the press, the function of the press and the media.

No one who is interested in democratic government and parliamentary government can be otherwise than very disturbed about this kind of relationship, this kind of obligation on the part of the media to government and to the people.