

THE NATURE OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC COMMUNITY

(An address delivered by the Permanent Representative of Canada to the North Atlantic Council, Mr. A. D. P. Heeneey, at the Atlantic Community Conference, Oxford, September 10 1952.)

... This Conference ... is addressing itself to a great, an urgent task of popular education. It seeks to strengthen our community by the only lasting means by which it can be made to endure — by making our objectives and our arrangements for attaining them better known among our peoples, by promoting among us a better knowledge of each other and of the contributions each has to make to the steady achievement of the objects we have set ourselves.

It is all very well for us, your servants and the representatives of your governments, to meet solemnly in Paris, in the Palais de Chaillot, and to call ourselves the North Atlantic Council. It is all very well, and no doubt essential, for us to pass resolutions and establish committees and working groups and to sign protocols and to issue statements. It is all very well, too, for our statesmen to make eloquent and inspiring speeches about the North Atlantic community — perhaps, indeed, we could do with more of these things just now. But, because we are free peoples, these things are not enough. There must be a wide and solid base in public opinion and conviction, if our association is to survive and to develop. If the citizens of our fourteen countries are not seized of the reasonableness and righteousness of what we are doing, they will not long sustain their governments in a course which involves so much effort and sacrifice on the part of all.

Now I propose ... to take advantage of the opportunity ... to make a few personal observations on the nature of this association of nations that we call the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. What manner of institution is this NATO, or "OTAN" as it is beginning to be called in Paris? Well, in the first place it is, of course, an alliance for defence against a military threat. But is it more than that — a political institution of some new kind? A first step toward a federation or confederation of states? Have we in NATO the beginnings of a genuine community of peoples?

Not long ago I heard a distinguished soldier provide a very brief answer to the question (which he himself had put to his audience) of how NATO could succeed in its first objective of providing an effective defence against the disaster which overhangs the free world. It is really very simple, he said. All that is necessary is for the fourteen representatives of the governments comprising the North Atlantic Council to have the political and moral courage to take the necessary decisions!

It seemed to me that this answer, whether given with tongue in cheek or otherwise, illustrates, if in somewhat extreme fashion, a quite basic, and, I think dangerous misunderstanding of the nature of the present Organization. For the fact is, of course, that the North Atlantic Council has no authority whatever to take the kind of decisions my military friend was talking about. And, did each of us fourteen permanent representatives possess even that high level of courage which he himself has so often displayed in battle, it would avail us little in the attainment of the objectives which we, equally with him, would have NATO achieve.

There is nothing to be gained by failure to recognize and appreciate the extraordinary complexity of what we are trying to do in NATO, or by under-estimating the difficulties. We are a voluntary organization of fourteen sovereign states. It is, I believe, quite strictly accurate to say that none of us have given up one single element of our sovereignty. The Prime Minister of this country made it abundantly clear in the House of Commons the other day that the United Kingdom Government had not abdicated its right to make decisions. And the same is true of the rest of us. In fact,