

The theme of our conference is "Liberalism in Europe and North America: Challenges in the 1980s"; the subject on which I was asked to speak is "North-America and Europe in North-South Relations"; and I am invited "as American speaker". Seldom have so few words prompted so many diverse reactions in me as that last phrase.

Whenever the late Lester Pearson was confronted with the question "Are you an American?" it was his custom to reply "Yes - I am a Canadian". Another of our politicians once proclaimed, "The Americans are our best friends, whether we like it or not" - he was not a liberal. The point is, that while there may be a distinct European identity and viewpoint, this is much less true in the Western Hemisphere. To a Canadian, an American is simply a citizen of the United States - and I would not presume to speak for that country. Nor, frankly, would I wish to try, given the basic differences in approach taken currently by our two governments on many North-South issues - perhaps most notably on the Law of the Sea.

What I can offer you, then, are simply some personal thoughts which I would hope are reasonably representative of Canadian attitudes, on the topics at hand - on the nature of liberalism and its attitude to challenges, on the problems that lie ahead on the domestic and world scenes, and particularly on what our response should be to the present North-South impasse.

For liberals, these questions have no cut-and-dried, ritualistic answers. Even the Encyclopedia Britannica begins its article on our movement by saying "Liberalism does not lend itself to easy definition". I am happy enough, however, with what Webster's Dictionary has to say about "liberal": "from the Latin for 'suitable for a freeman', akin to old English for 'to grow' and Greek for 'free'; of a political party associated with ideals of individual freedom, greater individual participation in government, and constitutional, political and administrative reforms".