No. 56/15   THE ATLANTIC COMMUNITY

An address by the Secretary of State
for External Affairs, Mr. L.B. Pearson,
to the English Speaking Union, London,
England, April 30, 1956.

It has long been an agreeable and innocent diversion
to the student of history to observe man's curious blindness
to important and even revolutionary events in the contemp-
orary scene. Almost any age - certainly including our own -
provides numerous examples to give us that curious but common
pleasure known as wisdom after the event.

At the very moment when Aristotle was designing the
best possible constitution and economy for the City-State,
his most renowned student, through his conquest of the
civilized world, was making the City-State concept of
Society obsolete. Long after the time when the introduction
of gunpowder had completely changed the facts of war, moated
castles continued to be built throughout Europe, even though
their interest had become more picturesque than strategic.
Early in the 19th century, as I recall, there were grave
misgivings in England concerning the increasingly acute
shortage of boxwood, with which alone the hubs of stage
coach wheels could be satisfactorily made: this at the time
when a network of railways was beginning to spread throughout
the country. You will remember, too, that as late as 1917
in the First World War, the Allied Command kept in readiness
a division or so of cavalry for the break-through to Berlin,
yet one would have thought that by 1917 it would have been
evident that cavalry, although continuing to give "an air
of distinction to what would otherwise have been disorderly
brawl", had largely gone the way of the crossbow and the
muzzle-loader. In our own day, it is probable that none of
us can fully apprehend the implications for war or peace of
the release of atomic energy. A century or so hence,
historians, if there still are any left, may wonder at our
astonishing shortsightedness.