



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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No. 59/7 THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY IN THE MODERN WORLD

A speech by Mr. John G. Diefenbaker, Prime Minister of Canada, at the Convocation of the University of Delhi, on November 22, 1958.

First, I must express my profound thanks and appreciation for the honour that has been done to me on behalf of my country. I am deeply appreciative of the fact that you have adopted me as a member of this great group and company, joined together as the University of Delhi. ...

Mr. Chancellor, I came to India as a student. Perhaps I have graduated rather more quickly, and certainly with less difficulty, on this occasion than on an earlier occasion, not so many years ago. I must say, Sir, and I have said this on a number of occasions lately, that the welcome that I have received here in India is something my wife and I will always treasure. It is an example of the warm friendship which is one of those things that has become part and parcel of the Commonwealth. As I listened to your words, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, in which you pointed out that we were bound by the silken threads of ideas shared in common and implemented in practice, I could not but feel an added fellowship in being honoured as I have been on this occasion.

I would like to say to you, Sir, Mr. Chancellor, that it is an added honour to have the degree at your hands. As Chancellor of this university, and as the Vice-President of India, you are esteemed everywhere in the world as one of the most distinguished scholars in the world and as a dedicated servant, not only to the Indian nation, but to the people of mankind as a whole. The Canadians have had the privilege of hearing you speak on more than one occasion. I need not recall to you that occasion at McGill University when you delivered the Beatty Lectures; when you shared with the Canadians your wisdom and clothed it with the majestic and inspiring language for which you are noted.

Though we are separated by many thousand miles, the quality and tradition of India's centres of learning, and of this University of Delhi, are known to Canadians and

Canada has welcomed many of your students. Indeed, in the universities of Asia, many of the well-springs of philosophy and science which we accept as part of our heritage, had their inspiration. It is in these universities, and in all universities which are dedicated, as this university is, to the abiding principles to which the Vice-Chancellor made a reference in speaking of the community of interest between Canada and India -- it is in these universities that the minds of future leaders are given wisdom. That is the highest contribution that any university can make. For when a man's mind, enriched by the knowledge of differing philosophies and thought, has learned to separate truth from falsehood and fact from fancy, then only and only then is the road to wisdom open to him.

It must not be forgotten in this scientific age that the enrichment of human life comes from an appreciation of philosophy, of literature and of art, and provides a brotherhood of the spirit which is of the essence in the maintenance of peace and the enrichment of mankind. No university, wherever it may be, which does not constitute itself as the guardian of freedom of thought and is not constantly engaged in search of truth, can achieve the highest service. And when I speak of truth, will you allow me to quote from a fellow-graduate of yours, Mr. Chancellor, the world-famous Doctor, Sir William Osler, when he said: "The Truth is the best that you can get with your best endeavour -- the best that the best men accept". And I think of the other definition of truth given by that incomparable leader, that man whose life's purpose was to serve others -- I refer of course to Mahatma Gandhi -- when he said this: "Truth is like a vast tree -- it yields more and more fruit the more you nurture it." I might say, paraphrasing those words, that peace is like a vast tree which yields more and more fruit, the more we nurture it, as we in Canada and as you in India endeavour to do. While I realize that there will be some who will not agree with me in this, being of the legal profession, I am one of those who believe that, while the trend in recent years has been away from the humanities, more and more mankind is realizing the necessity of the maintenance of the liberal arts. A stern struggle is being waged between the liberal arts and the sciences. Indeed, it has been epigrammatically summarized in this way, following the words of Gilbert and Sullivan: "Every boy and every girl that's born into the world this year must be a little scientist or a little engineer".

I am among those who believe that, while emphasis on scientific knowledge and achievements is of paramount importance in raising the standards of mankind, the elevation of those things which are within our grasp, we must at no time forsake

the enrichment of the spirit which contributes to the freedom of the mind. Nor may we permit ourselves the luxury of subverting education to materialistic purposes, thereby bringing about the irretrievable loss of freedom itself. Science, by discovery and research, has made it possible for mankind to live as never before and to die in a manner never before contemplated. The unrealities of space fiction have become realities in the launching of satellites and the attempts to reach the moon. These are achievements that have been attained as a result of the scientific institutions and competition between scientists in various parts of the world. Materialism, however, should not become a guiding star or a guiding principle of universities and at no time should there be subordination of scientific study to State purposes. As I look to the years ahead, while believing that the liberal arts must receive the first consideration, I realize that there will be in the nature of things a vast increase in the number of those taking engineering and applied science courses. But again I say that the increase in the number of graduates in science and engineering emphasizes the necessity of there being no sacrifice of the social studies which contribute to a full and purposeful life. This university under your Chancellorship, Sir, and under your predecessors, has been acclaimed as maintaining the primacy of the spiritual springs from which it draws its strength, while at the same time being one of the leading institutions of science.

Now, may I say a word for Canada. We owe a tremendous debt to Asia, for the heritage of those things, those worthwhile things that are ours, and for the maintenance of principles during the Dark Ages. Canada obviously cannot make a comparable contribution, nor can she hope to repay the debt that she owes to older civilizations. We are blessed, however, with abundant natural resources and modern technical and industrial skills and Canada is, in the spirit referred to in the citation, prepared, I assure you, to share these with other nations such as India. Canada welcomes the opportunity referred to by the Vice-Chancellor to co-operate with India and other countries in a spirit of brotherhood and to make its contribution materially through the Colombo Plan.

We also joined with other nations at the Commonwealth Conference in Montreal last September in a measure to preserve these spiritual things. The essence of our proposal is to provide for an exchange of opinion and exchange of students. This is one of the suggestions that I placed before the Commonwealth Conference, though others had done so earlier. The establishment of a system of exchange scholarships will in a very few years, possibly within two years, provide for an exchange of 1000 students and teachers between various parts of the Commonwealth, thereby providing in effect a University

in the Commonwealth. In this we are following the principles upon which universities were originally constituted, namely, that the world's scholars should gather together. We intend in Canada to look after one quarter of the students participating in the scheme and to supply the same number of teachers and experts needed for the purpose in other countries. These scholarships, as I said, will provide new vistas of opportunity, wisdom and tolerance among the various peoples of the Commonwealth.

We in Canada accept quite large numbers of students from other countries. Indeed, today we find ourselves with an ever-mounting increase of the numbers of students, as I am sure you do, and we are faced with the difficulty of providing the necessary technical provisions that are requisite to the increase -- the necessary buildings and facilities. Even so, out of our total university enrolment of 86,000 we have today approximately 4,000 from other countries, including India. They bring to us a new viewpoint and a new realization of that common concept of brotherhood which universities provide in all parts of the world.

We also provide opportunities -- and I am not trying to secure mobilisation of recruits, Mr. Vice-Chancellor -- but we also provide opportunities for graduate students, including Ph.D.'s, to carry on research work in their chosen fields. Our National Research Council provides scholarships tenable in the laboratories of the Council and providing as well the necessary openings in the Departments of Agriculture, Mines and Technical Surveys and in the Department of National Health and Welfare. These fellowships and scholarships are awarded on the basis of competition, wherein any student anywhere in the world within the Commonwealth, may compete on terms of equality with the students of our own country.

Sir, as I am about to leave India, I repeat what I said last evening and which is something that bears repeating: I again express that deep emotion that is mine. I thank this university, Mr. Prime Minister and the people of India as a whole, for that indescribably kind and friendly reception that has been accorded to my wife and myself here.

The public men of this country have been the personification, internationally and within the Commonwealth, of those principles for which we stand. I know that sometimes those who are politicians are not regarded -- I am speaking about my own country -- with universal approbation; they are subjected to a measure of criticism that is sometimes cynical in its origin. But I am one of those who believe that, while science can make its contribution and must continue to do so, the study of economics and sociology provides the means whereby we may raise standards and understand each other better.

And the final transition of those principles or of those discoveries into practical application for the benefit of the people rests in a large degree with the politicians. If I may say so, Mr. Chancellor, you are the exemplification of that principle that I now enunciate. Participation in public affairs is of necessity a major responsibility of our universities. It is their responsibility to achieve the Greek ideal of the citizen participating actively and particularly in the affairs of community, so that thereby we shall be enabled, in the responsibilities that are ours in public life, to think like men of action and act like men of thought.

Freedom is the quality of mind and spirit that binds us together, as you said, Sir, in the all too kind citation. Let me add this: that free institutions are the creation of free minds and free spirits and the challenge today to the universities is that we shall maintain at all times and at all costs the freedom to think, to search for the truth and in our own way to find the truth. I believe that this university, now mine by adoption, measures up in a large degree to my understanding of the major function of a university.

Mr. Chancellor, I see India great in tradition, magnificent in its service to mankind. I see India in the days ahead with a larger and greater vista for the world's service than ever before. I see her in that position because she has seemed to me, in my all too short visit to various parts of this country, to have mobilised, in the spirit of Gandhi, men and women devoted to public service who, in the words of Arnold Toynbee, "will not accept the inevitability of the present but will help to form it". That is my message to you today, deeply fascinated as I am by what I have seen, inspired by these Plans, these economic plans, designed to raise the standards of the people.

I leave you by again using the words that I used last evening, the authorship of which I have not been able to determine, which through the years have been an inspiration to me; words which I understand had an important place on me of the tablets in this country; words representative of the eternal realities and of the demands life makes on every one of us: "In thought, have faith; in words have wisdom; in life give service; in death be courageous". So will India be great.

Mr. Chancellor, I thank you for this honour to my country which I know will be treasured by my people as it will be by me.

S/C