

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

NO. 50/43

THE PRESERVATION OF CIVILIZATION

An address by Mr. L.S. St. Laurent, Prime Minister of Canada, delivered at the Autumn Convocation of the University of Toronto, on October 27, 1950.

.... It is a melancholy reflection on the times we live in that we should feel obliged to be concerned over the preservation of civilization. Half a century ago, when I was an undergraduate at another university, I doubt if any of us gave a thought to this question. In those days we were nearly all confident that civilization was advancing steadily over the face of the globe, that the only serious obstacles to the advance of civilization were ignorance and barbarism, and that these obstacles would eventually be overcome.

At the beginning of this century very few people dreamed that a menace to the existence of civilization might arise in the very heart of the civilized world. Yet that is precisely what has happened in the twentieth century with Fascism, Nazism and Communism alike.

What is more, the enslavement of the minds of human beings is not an incidental feature of totalitarianism, whether it takes the form of Fascism or Nazism or Communism. The very essence of the totalitarian state is the regimentation of all aspects of human life and all forms of human expression. I am sure all of us are convinced if the human mind is enslaved, civilization will eventually disappear. I think most of us would also agree that, given time, any totalitarian structure would be bound to collapse because no organized society can hope to endure indefinitely without some means of training independent and truly educated minds. But the process of internal decay and collapse might easily require several generations, during which the totalitarian state by its very nature, would remain a threat to the existence of all its free neighbours. In the case of a totalitarian state with the population and resources of the Soviet Union, such a threat is, in fact, a menace to civilization itself.

I say a totalitarian state, by its very nature, must remain a threat to its free neighbours. I believe this proposition is incontrovertible. The totalitarian state can be maintained only by armed force. That armed force may exist primarily to keep the subject population in slavery but its very existence constitutes a threat to other nations without equal strength. And this menace is redoubled because the masters of such a state justify the maintenance of armed might on the ground that their own state is really the one which is in danger and must dominate all its neighbours for its own preservation.

The Nazi state was founded on the doctrine that the German people were a master race with a right, as such, to conquer and rule the lesser breeds of the human family. Nazi rule was based openly and nakedly on force, and ten years ago virtually the whole world was convinced that unless this force was destroyed it would destroy everything worthwhile in the world.

The terrible menace of Nazi domination - and we should never forget it was a terrible menace - was destroyed by a mighty effort on the part of the rest of the world. In overcoming the Nazi menace, the Russian people had a heroic part. I believe the vast majority of people all over the free world were ready, in 1945, to co-operate with the Russians in peace as they had co-operated with us in war.

We could hardly be blamed for hoping that the victory, won at so terrible a cost, would give real peace to the world and that it would give humanity a real chance to devote its energies to constructive activities. In 1945, many of us cherished the hope that, even if full co-operation with the Soviet Union could not be achieved, we might at least reach a tolerable *modus vivendi* based upon a common weariness of war and a common desire for peace.

In 1945, many people felt that Communism, after all, was not the same thing as Nazism. Of course, the philosophical basis of Communism was repugnant to most of us and the barbarity of Communist practices was even more repugnant, but, at least, the Communists did not claim to be a master race with a natural right to dominate the whole world by force. The Nazi state glorified war; the Communist state had never openly done so. The goal of Communism was said to be the material welfare of mankind and, in the Communist ideology, force was looked upon as a means to an end, not the end itself.

It is precisely this theoretical goal of increased material welfare for the less fortunate part of humanity, accompanied by the Communist propaganda in favour of racial equality, which has constituted at once the main appeal and the greatest ideological danger of totalitarian Communism. The fact that Communism, in its Soviet form, denies the essential importance of the human being and the possibility of the individual ever influencing his own fate, in this world or in the hereafter, is often lost sight of by those to whom the Communist myth appeals.

On the other hand, this appeal of Communism to the unfortunate and the oppressed has had one good effect. It has sharpened our realization that we must do something ourselves to remove the social evils which provide the breeding ground for Communist support.

Mr. Arnold Toynbee has pointed out in a recent article that, if the Communists continue in their present course, "we may see them rouse the Western World to cure itself of the faults for which the Communists denounce it, and to fulfil, in our own Western way, any admirable aims that are on Communism's official agenda."

Of course it is not the intention of the Communists to push our Western civilization into putting its house in better order, but there are increasing grounds for believing that is what they may be accomplishing.

The so-called "iron curtain" has failed to conceal from the Western world the wide disparity between the theoretical aims of Communism and the actual social accomplishments of Communist totalitarianism, and the number of those in the Western World who are deceived by Soviet propoganda diminishes week by week. But the military strength of Communist Russia and the policies of its masters in these post-war years have convinced all but the blindest among us that the only hope of immediate security for the rest of the world lies in building up armed strength sufficient to be an effective deterrent to the potential aggression of this latest military tyranny.

Moreover, I think we all recognize, after the terrible experiences of this twentieth century, that a third world war, no matter how complete our ultimate victory, could not fail to be a major disaster for civilization. If war should come between those who profess the gross materialism of Communist ideology and those who accept the moral ideals of our Christian civilization, I am firmly convinced that the powers of evil, like the gates of Hell, would not prevail. But such a struggle, regardless of the outcome, would itself be a disaster. Consequently all of us who are seriously concerned about the preservation of civilization simply have no choice but to do our part in providing the absolutely indispensable insurance against that disaster. Our first duty to civilization is, therefore, the provision of sufficient military strength, including the industrial strength on which real military strength today is based, to make the risk of starting another war a risk not worth taking.

For the last two years, the building up of that deterrent strength through the North Atlantic Alliance and, more recently, through the United Nations action in Korea, has been the first preoccupation of the Government of Canada and of the governments of the free nations with which we are associated. The provision of effective insurance against another world war is likely to continue to be one of our main problems for a good many years to come.

This policy of insurance through strength, in these times of rapid technological advance, is bound to make tremendous demands upon our universities to provide scientific and professional training and also the higher kinds of technical training. These demands are particularly severe in a country like ours, which is developing new resources at such an amazing rate, and it is very important that all these demands should be met, and met adequately. In meeting them, the universities are performing essential, national services.

But we have to recognize at the same time that there is another side to the preservation of civilization. It will never be enough to have sufficient strength to deter or restrain the external enemies of civilization. The task of keeping alive and flourishing, the civilization we are organizing ourselves to protect may not be quite so urgent in the short run, but it is equally vital if we are thinking not in terms of one or two years but of one or two decades.

A free civilization cannot be preserved behind an iron curtain, however strong. And I doubt if anyone believes that there can be any enduring civilization without freedom for individual men and women.

While I was preparing my notes for this address I came across a lecture by Professor Jacques Maritain, who I understand is well known in this University. The lecture originally delivered in Paris in 1939 was published in an English version in 1942 and is entitled "The Twilight of Civilization".

In the original lecture Professor Maritain said that "each time that someone in any country cedes to some infiltration of the totalitarian spirit, under any form whatsoever, under any disguise, one battle for civilization has been lost".

Then in the foreword written in 1942, he used these words: "The defeat of Germany will not solve all the problems of freedom to be won, of civilization to be rescued and rebuilt. But it is a necessary condition if they are to be solved and the world freed from the slavery which today threatens each and everyone of us."

What all this means is that we have only begun the task of preserving civilization when we have provided security against the forces of barbarism from without. We must also provide security against the influences of barbarism we have found in the midst of our civilized communities. To preserve civilization, we have to nourish the spirit within.

Our Western world has accepted the doctrine that men and women have the right to choose - and to dismiss - their governments for themselves; and to order their affairs as they see fit. It is evident, therefore, that if we are to preserve civilization, we must keep alive in our populations an attachment to the values of civilization; and we must make sure that the benefits of civilization are available to the many and not reserved for the few.

We cannot neglect the less fortunate in our own midst, nor can we ignore the plight of nations less fortunate than our own. The preservation of civilization requires us to help those untold millions, most of them in Asia, to improve their standards of life and to achieve a situation they will feel it is worthwhile to defend. Despite our relatively small population, we have advantages here in Canada which fit us to contribute effectively to a combined effort to convince the less fortunate peoples that even on the material plane the free world has more to offer than Communism. It is not without significance that Canada should have furnished the first Director for the Technical Assistance Programme of the United Nations.

In addition to the material benefits there must however, be a fount of spiritual values in our free societies. We in the Western world have adopted the conception of good and evil from the Hebrew and Greek civilizations. This concept has been transformed and transmitted to us through our Christian traditions. It comprises a belief in the intrinsic value of every individual human being and a sense of obligation to our neighbour. Its very essence is freedom. And the nurture of this spirit of our free society is the primary function of the universities. It is even more important than the obligations to train men and women for scientific and professional pursuits.

The Universities are, without question, among the most precious of our national institutions. Now I recognize, and I believe most Canadians recognize, the wisdom of the provision of our constitution which made education perhaps the most important of all those subjects entrusted to the provincial authorities. This provision was designed primarily to safeguard both of the two cultural traditions which we Canadians possess and which, year by year, we are coming to cherish more and more, as we realize how greatly they enrich our national life. The entrusting of education to the provincial authorities has the further advantage of providing a measure of insurance against too great a degree of uniformity in our educational systems. No one with any real respect for our history and tradition would wish to disturb that constitutional position. At the same time, I think many of us recognize increasingly that some means must be found to ensure to our universities the financial capacity to perform the many services which are required in the interest of the whole nation. I hope you, Mr. Chancellor, in association with your colleagues in another of your capacities, will be able to help us to find a proper solution of that difficult problem.

In seeking a solution of the problem we must never lose sight of the fact that, essential though it is to provide for the training of scientists and of men and women for the professions, this is not the highest national service the universities perform. Their highest service is to educate men and women in that liberal and humane tradition which is the glory of our Christian civilization. The first task of a true University is to keep alive the flame of civilization itself. This great academic community, this great federation of Universities with their rich and varied traditions, here in Toronto, has been faithful to that essential trust. And that is the reason I shall be proud, from today, to number myself among the alumni of the University of Toronto.

s/c