RNMENT

CANADA

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

NO. 51/43

THE UNIVERSITIES AND THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Partial text of an address given by the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. A.D.P. Heeney, at the United College Commencement, Winnipeg, on November 9, 1951.

...I propose to invite your attention for a few minutes to the relationship of Canadian Universities and Colleges to the Public Service of our country. And, because I realize that many of you before me will be giving to the problem of your post graduate careers that anxious thought for which undergraduates are so infrequently given credit, I shall take advantage of the opportunity to put before you certain principal features of the professional service of the state - a service, I admit, which may involve plenty of hard work without great material recompense - but a service too, which is capable of unique satisfactions and rewards.

In the recent Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, the Commissioners drew attention to the importance of the Universities as a source of recruits for the Public Service. They pointed out that, today, university qualifications are required for more and more posts, that there were already some 8,000 graduates of Canadian universities in the federal service. My own Department of External Affairs, for example - by no means one of the largest of the Federal government departments - employs something between 250 and 300 University graduates. Other departments of government have similar and greater requirements for University trained men and women in many branches. And, as our national services expand to meet new demands, this requirement will increase year by year.

It used to be that the Civil Service was regarded by many, if not most Canadians, as a refuge for the misfits and the indolent - a haven to be come to by party patronage - a safe billet for those who had neither the brains nor the ambition to make their own way. Again, there is the latter-day conception of some - the Civil Servant as the "bureaucrat", the soulless state functionary whose pleasure it is to interfere with the liberty of the individual in the administration of the multifarious orders and regulations of a central government - a government determined apparently to plan every department of our lives from the cradle to the grave.

Whatever basis in fact these views may have once possessed, both are now far from the truth. Indeed, I believe that, today, the general level of industry, intelligence and esprit de corps in the Civil Service of Canada is one in which Canadians can have reasonable confidence and even some pride.

And it is, I think, quite essential that the standards of our national Public Service should be high - just as high as we can make them, in capacity and in character. For, in recent years, the importance to the nation of the efficient operation of

the machinery of government has very greatly increased. Within the past quarter-century, government in Canada, as indeed in every modern state, has become very intimately involved in the lives of the people; agencies of government touch almost every phase of our existence from childhood to old age. In this period we have been undergoing the process of change from what the political scientists call the "negative" to the "positive" state - from the conception of an authority set up to prevent disorder to one with positive responsibility for the standards of its citizens. And this process is still going on.

I am not arguing that this process is good, though I do not imagine there are many that would now contend that it is wholly bad. I am simply saying that this development has taken place, is still proceeding; and that it has changed the character of the state. People, to a greater or less degree in all countries have demanded that their governments undertake a wide range of functions and provide a great variety of services which our fathers regarded as the responsibility partly of the individual and partly of Providence. I am speaking not only of the great public programmes in the social sphere - family allowances, old age pensions, health services and the rest. I am thinking as well of the many and immensely varied technical and other services which citizens expect modern governments to provide. These are not nearly so well known to the public generally. They range all the way from weather forecasting to the distribution of films and the operation of radio programmes, and the provision of scientific, commercial and industrial intelligence and advice. Furthermore, governments, nowadays, are expected to relieve and restore the victims of natural disaster as well as to provide measures of assistance to areas depressed by physical and economic causes.

This vast extension of the functions of government has had a direct and cumulative effect upon the Civil Service. Not only has it involved, for obvious reasons, an immense increase in the numbers which governments have had to employ - the Public Service of Canada, for example, is about three times what it was in 1926 - but, more significant, this metamorphosis in the nature of government has increased enormously the importance of the Civil Service and the influence of Civil Servants in the affairs of the nation. In an earlier day, when the responsibilities of government were for the most part limited to the maintenance of order, the administration of justice and the provision of modest defences, we needed nobody much in the state employ except judges and policemen, a few, very few, soldiers and sailors and, of course, a certain number of tax collectors and customs inspectors. Nowadays, there must be at the disposal of the state a very considerable army of functionaries, a large proportion of whom require a high standard of education and training.

Add to this the special and urgent demands of the heavy defence programmes required in the present situation of international tension and you will readily appreciate the proportions of this problem of modern government.

The volume and variety of public business has thus entailed this large increase in the Public Service and has involved the government in the employment of this wide range of experts of every kind. But it has worked a more fundamental change in the position of the civil servant. It has altered his role in the machinery of government and added greatly to his importance and authority.

I do not mean to suggest that the fundamental distinction between the function of the civil servant and the function of the political authority - Parliament, the Cabinet, the Minister - has been altered. It has not. Happily, under our Parliamentary system what Sir William Harcourt once said is still true - "Political heads of departments are necessary to tell the civil servant what the public will not stand". Nevertheless, more and more, the very weight of public affairs has forced the Minister to cast an increasing share of the administrative burden upon his officials. And whatever the quantity and quality of his assistance, the tax upon a modern Minister's physical and intellectual capacities remains enormous. The Minister, therefore, in these conditions, cannot do otherwise than entrust to his subordinates almost everything except major policy decisions. At the same time, after more than a dozen years of close association with Ministers I can reassure you on one point - Ministers really do make the big decisions.

These are the circumstances, deriving from the development of our political democracy which have, in recent years, so greatly enhanced the position of the civil servant in our national life. These are the conditions which, imposing these larger responsibilities, have made it imperative, in the interests of the nation, that we should have in Canada a Public Service of the highest quality, of the highest standards.

The failure of an inefficient or negligent civil servant can rarely perhaps be measured in terms of human lives in the same sense as that of an incompetent or cowardly commander in the field. But history, and indeed the world around us today, affords some dramatic examples of what a good and what a bad public service may accomplish. A proud constitution, studded with declarations of human rights and civil liberties, is no sure barrier against corruption, subversion or even the violent overthrow of the state. Indeed no single factor - neither the law, nor political traditions, nor even the character of a nation - are alone sufficient to guarantee stability, order and justice. But an independent, honest and devoted civil service is one of the proven bulwarks of continuity and freedom.

If we are to develop and maintain a Public Service of high quality, we must be able to attract to its ranks some of the best of our young men and women. Here it is that our educational institutions, our colleges and universities, have a major, an essential part to play.

In the first place they must adhere to their best traditions and provide their students with the opportunities of sound learning. More important to the future servant of the state than any courses in government or public administration - however admirable these may be, and they can be of real value - more important still are the basic elements of what used to be known as a liberal education. Special knowledge, special skills of many kinds - these too will be necessary to the aspiring candidate for the senior posts. But such technical qualifications cannot alone provide what the nation most requires of its more responsible officials - the intellectual and moral disciplines which derive from sound general education. Years ago Macaulay insisted on what he called "general intelligence" in contrast to special training as the basis of selection for administrative officers in the British Civil Service. To my mind, among the most important qualification for the higher posts in our own Public Service are those which go to make up this "general intelligence" - a sense of proportion and historical perspective, awareness of social and

moral values. And it seems to me that it is precisely these elements which, by inclination and tradition, institutions like United College are best qualified to impart.

In the second place, Universities and Colleges may do much to reinforce our Civil Service by keeping before their students the idea and the ideal of direct service of the state. In recent years the relationship between those in the Public Service responsible for recruitment and the faculties and students of our Universities has become much closer and more satisfactory than it used to be. This is all to the good. When I was an undergraduate I cannot remember a single one of my contemporaries who had in any way before him as a possible career - the Canadian Public Service. I do recall one or two had been attracted by the opportunities available under the British Colonial Office. But of the Civil Service of Canada we knew less than little and cared less than that.

The Civil Service of the United Kingdom has long been a model to the world largely because of the prestige which it enjoys in British Universities. For generations the Treasury, the "Home Civil" and the Foreign Office have had their pick from among the best University graduates. We in Canada are making progress in this direction. It is important that we should continue to do so, until the entry each year into the professional service of their country of a suitable proportion of the best of their graduates becomes an integral part of Canadian University tradition, from Victoria to St. John's.

The part which the Universities have played and continue to play in the scientific activities of government in Canada is better known and more widely understood. Through the National Research Council, and more recently through the Defence Research Board, as well as through the scientific branches and divisions of various departments in Ottawa, the Universities have a direct partnership with government. The scientific achievements of Canada during the last war and since would have been quite impossible without this intimate and workmanlike regime of continuing co-operation and mutual aid in fundamental and applied research. Reviewing this field in relation to present needs, the Massey Commissioners observed "our very safety depends upon this work of vital national importance".

There are other ways in which the Universities can and do contribute to the proper conduct of the business of government to the Public Service. More and more frequently, for example, members of academic staffs are borrowed by government departments for special duties, not only in times of emergency but quite customarily now as a matter of normal practice. My own Department is heavily indebted to the academic profession for work of this character. In some instances, I am afraid we have rejoined by purloining professors for our regular service. Their contribution has been a notable one. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how the Department of External Affairs would have been able to meet the demands of the war and post war years had we not been able to call upon the Universities for skilled and devoted reinforcements from their teaching staffs.

You will not now be in doubt concerning my view of the relationship between the Universities and the Public Service.

It seems to me both right and fitting that we should look first to our Universities and Colleges to provide men and women willing to devote their lives to the service of Canada, men and women of good capacity and with trained and eager minds - but, more than that, men and women of sound character with the moral as well as the intellectual qualities which are the foundation of institutions such as this United College. ...

S/A