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PEACE THROUGH THE UNITED NATIONS

An address by Mr. L. B. Pearson, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, at the Annual Dinner of the Toronto Board of Trade, January 26, 1948.

The hope for achievement of world peace, that distant dream of man since the days when he first became the victim of a rock hurled at him by a belligerent neighbour, rests largely, I submit, on the realization of two possibilities.

The first of these, though bound to be the last in accomplishment, is one world with one law and one government. That may come slowly, as a result of evolution, or quickly as a result of conquest. If the former, man will have to show far more wisdom in the future than he has ever shown in the past. It is possible, of course -- anything is possible -- that the awful potentialities of scientific progress in a politically anarchic society may force wisdom on him through fear. It is possible, but a peace which balances uneasily on the thin edge of fear of the consequences of war, does not inspire too much confidence in its ability to survive.

Certainly there is at the moment little evidence of our one world in any sense of the word except the geographic. Physically we are one world. We are, if not our brothers' keepers, at least all our brothers' neighbours. But we should not fool ourselves by believing that propinquity always means peace or that rubbing shoulders doesn't make for friction as often as friendliness. There is less feeling of one world in a political or spiritual sense at this particular moment in history than at any time, perhaps, since the break-up of the Roman Empire. That break-up splintered mankind into hundreds of political and social fragments. Current developments are breaking mankind into, not twenty, but two fragments and that is more sinister and more dangerous.

Our one world, and our one government, may also come suddenly and terribly by one of these two worlds becoming an aggressor, over-running the other, and bombing and blasting all peoples into submission. This would simply mean the peace and order of the cemetery. Either the conquered would become slaves of the global conqueror, or more probably, victors and vanquished alike would perish. This may seem to be wild and fanciful talk; the reflection of a mind upset by fear. It is not. Nearly all the great scientists of our democratic world - those of the other world are not permitted to let us know what they think - have expressed views on the destructive possibilities of the "harnessing of science to the Chariot of Destruction" which are as clear as they are terrifying. Bertrand Russell, for instance, in an address in London not long ago - and he is no sensationalist in these matters - sketched in a few cold but devastating phrases the possible effect of man's scientific genius on man's physical survival. Bacteriological warfare, if it ever came, he said, would destroy all vegetable and animal life. Even the moss would shrivel on the rock, and our world "would roll on through space a large and lifeless lump of stone." If, however, bacteria were not used and the belligerents with great restraint, stuck to the more

old-fashioned atom bomb, the effect might well be the same, extinction. According to Russell, and others, after the nations had dropped a certain number of these bombs on each other, radio-active clouds would be formed, which, drifting over the earth, would annihilate everything in their paths. Only a few Eskimo and other isolationists, might survive to give man a second chance.

So what we are really concerned with -- or should be -- is not the ways and means of avoiding a Charge of the Light Brigade war or even a Battle of the Bulge -- which is already, militarily, almost as out of date -- but the means by which the human race can avert wars which must ultimately and literally mean its own extinction.

It is well for us not to forget these things - in the pressure of more immediate problems such as the cost of a pound of butter or the hockey fortunes of the Maple Leafs.

There is another development, however, by which, if it takes place, we may escape the fate that modern science, applied to medieval social and political ideas, is preparing for us. That way is the growth of the United Nations into an organization which will really guarantee security.

The United Nations is not yet very old - two years - about half the time it takes to produce a baby elephant or a graduate in arts at Toronto university. So we have no right to be impatient or unduly critical if all our hopes for the United Nations have not been realized or if its accomplishments have not been great. It took three years to plan D-day, and we may surely be given a little more time than that to bring about the millennium.

It is not the lack of concrete accomplishment that provokes grave doubts about the capability of the organization to do the job it was given, to keep the peace. It is a realization that this may be made impossible by international developments, more particularly by the embitterment and intensification of ideological and political conflicts, between the two super powers, the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R., each watching the other across a widening chasm of suspicion and mistrust; each a leader of the two groups into which the world is tragically dividing.

In this political climate, the United Nations, even with a perfect charter, could not guarantee peace and security. In this political climate and with an imperfect charter, the structural weaknesses of the organization are becoming depressingly apparent, and are in their turn exposing and encouraging trends and tendencies which weaken it even further. The fact is that the United Nations was founded on the ability and desire of the great powers to work together for peace. Given that desire, the present charter would be satisfactory and the powers of the organization sufficient. Without that desire, the United Nations is ineffective as a law enforcing and peace preserving agency. It cannot instil any confidence in its ability to chastise speedily and effectively any nation that violates its charter or threatens security. Any such punitive action against a great power is impossible and even action against a small power is virtually so, because most small powers now have big friends.

The expression of this powerlessness - but not the cause of it - is the privilege of the veto which under the charter is given to the Five Permanent Members of the Security Council. In the bad relations between the Great Powers which have now existed for too long a time, that veto-limitation has been enlarged and extended beyond anything contemplated at San Francisco when the charter was drafted. At that time, it was understood, -- indeed it was definitely so pledged by the five states who were to possess it -- that it would be used with responsibility and restraint; only in grave cases where the consequences of a decision might mean war.

It was certainly never intended that it should be used -- as it has been used -- quite irresponsibly and selfishly to prevent the operation of machinery for the settlement of disputes and the removal of causes of trouble. If we were too optimistic at San Francisco -- though I assure you this optimism was by no means universal, especially among the Middle Powers -- it was because we felt that the links of friendship and cooperation forged between the Great Powers in the heat of a common struggle for survival against Fascist forces of evil, might remain, if not unimpaired, at least unbroken, after victory was won. That hope has been bitterly disappointed. Those links have been snapped, and one by one discarded. History has once again shown the senseless and selfish folly of man, in throwing aside after a war the methods and the spirit of international compromise and cooperation which alone had made possible his victory.

In 1948 there is little left, between the two great groups into which the world is forming, of that confidence, cooperation and respect which can alone make the present United Nations a workable instrument for establishing peace and security. We might as well face that fact. One consequence of it is that the veto power in the Security Council has been -- and indeed in this situation is bound to be -- used for the protection of selfish national interests by those who are aggressive or suspicious or do not desire international cooperation except on their own terms. The veto, therefore, which has been justified as necessary to preserve the unanimity of the Great Powers by ensuring that they all act together, merely highlights their disunity. Its repeated use -- and it has been used by one state twenty-two times -- simply underlines the weakness of the Security Council as the instrument for establishing security. It reduces action in that body -- on controversial political issues -- to the lowest common denominator of inaction. Unity is, finally, achieved, but on the basis of zero; on the basis of no runs, no hits and no errors; that is, no errors of commission, only lost chances.

We should not, however, mistake the symptom for the disease. The system is the veto-scarred record of the Security Council of the United Nations. The disease is the division of one cooperating world into two opposing worlds.

The futilities and frustrations which sometimes occur in the meetings of the United Nations, and more particularly the Security Council, have been the consequence and not the cause of this division.

So we find that instead of a United Nations based on the idea and the principles of a cooperative world community, we have a United Nations in which too many of the members are concerned primarily with the protection of their own exclusive national interests. The emphasis is placed on individual sovereignty instead of collective responsibility; on national defence, instead of collective security. Instead of the United Nations acting as a forum for the expression of the conscience of mankind, it is becoming a platform for the aggressive propagation of ideological passions and reactionary and revolutionary plans. Discussion is debased to the level of vilification. It is, of course, a good thing to have disputes and grievances exposed, and talked out, but only if the exposure is for the purpose of reaching some understanding which will solve the disputes and remove the grievances. I do not suggest that we return to the superficial courtesies and hypocritical concealments of the old diplomacy, where aristocratic gentlemen gracefully bowed low while preparing to stab you in the back. There is something to be said for standing up and calling a spade a spade. There is nothing, however, to be said for shaking your fist and calling it a blankety-blank American or British or Soviet shovel.

Debate designed to inflame is merely the degradation of free discussion, and there has been too much of that at the United Nations

recently. The old diplomacy -- even the old secret diplomacy -- has shone at times by contrast.

It is now quite clear that the primary interest of certain governments in the United Nations Assembly is the use to which it can be put as an agency for the propagation of national policies, and subversive ideologies which are very often used for the support of such policies. The experience of the recent Assembly seems to show that, in the pursuit of this objective, any means justifies the end; any techniques are permissible. No holds are barred, no rules of truth or conduct are observed. No decent international purpose is sought or served.

The "war-mongering" debate at the last assembly was a good example of this propaganda practice. It was introduced by the delegate of the U.S.S.R. in a resolution which was so worded and in a speech that was so provocative and intemperate that acceptance was impossible. But no one wished to be put in a position of supporting "war-mongering". So conscientious delegates were, for a time, in a dilemma. That may have been one purpose of the Soviet resolution. Another was its value for home consumption, both inside Russia and, more or less the same thing, inside communist parties outside Russia. There might have been a useful and constructive debate on this subject, during which the unanimous yearning of all peoples for peace and their horror at the blood and sacrifice of war, might have been given moving and impressive expression in the Assembly of the nations, with a ringing and sincere declaration against every form of war-mongering, including civil war-mongering. Instead of that we had violent tirades and personal attacks, on the one side, and efforts on the other at protection against this international mud-slinging. Too often, at the last assembly, the town meeting of the world tended to become an ideological brawl.

The use of the assembly for such offensive propagandistic purposes; for attacks on nations as a part of power policies; for undermining the democratic way of life, and stirring up class and racial hatreds, and every form of civil strife, is the prostitution of our United Nations organization to an ignoble and aggressive purpose.

In the face of this, what should delegations do who still believe in the high ideals of the United Nations and in the possibility of free peoples working together for peace, friendship and prosperity? Should they reply in kind? No. There is no need to lower ourselves to that level. Not reply at all? That would be a mistake. We should not let this struggle go by default. We should, I suggest, do two things. Expose, coolly and factually, the false arguments and conclusions of those who are trying to establish a totalitarian tyranny, which is as old as sin and as reactionary as slavery. More important, however, we should go on the offensive ourselves. Those peoples who believe in freedom and democracy, justice and equality before the law, who are genuinely sincere in their efforts to broaden and deepen the area of international cooperation, should take the lead in declaring the progressiveness and the superiority of their policies and ideals in the councils of the nations. The fact is that the United Nations, through no fault of the freedom loving states, is becoming a vital field for political warfare. In that warfare we should take the offensive, and should back up that offensive by showing the people on the dark side of the moon that our system works better than theirs for the only purpose worth achieving, the dignity, security and prosperity of the individual man.

This does not mean that because certain states use the United Nations for furthering a selfish and aggressive national policy or for promoting subversive movements, (sometimes the two coincide) that others need follow this bad example. There could be no quicker way of destroying our international organization or weakening our own position inside that organization. We can exalt our own free way of life without being shrill or ill-tempered over that which others choose, or have

chosen for them. We can also seek security through the United Nations, without always seeking at the same time international support for every national policy. There can be only one legitimate policy advanced in the assembly of the nations of the world and that is the collective policy of them all, or of as many as are willing to work together for carrying out the peaceful principles of the Charter. If any nation can cover up its own aggressive designs and is able to get support for them by appealing to the hopes or the fears of its fellow members of the United Nations, the organization, as now constituted, is obviously doomed. Even, when national policies are non-aggressive and defensive in character, great care should be taken in making the United Nations the instrument for their realization.

There is another and related danger confronting the United Nations; the tendency to use it -- and especially the Security Council -- as a means of avoiding national responsibility for dealing with difficult international situations. It is, I suppose, tempting to shelve this responsibility by putting it on an international organization, but it should not be forgotten that all members of that organization, if they are parties to a dispute, pledge themselves first to seek a solution by negotiation, conciliation or by some other peaceful means before they bring it to the Security Council.

There have been occasions recently when the services of the United Nations should not, I think, have been invoked because the parties mainly concerned with the situation had not exhausted other, and direct means of settlement; or because the problem was beyond the present capacity of a new and uncertain organization. On the other hand, there have been occasions when the United Nations should not have been ignored in favour of national action.

There is danger to any international organization if its members base their decisions either to by-pass or to exploit it solely on considerations of immediate national convenience or advantage.

A Greek philosopher surveying the government of his state many centuries ago said "no more good must be attempted than the nation can bear". Surveying the scene at Lake Success today I would suggest "no more good must be attempted than the United Nations can bear".

It may eventually be fatal to the United Nations, if it is asked to accept commitments which it cannot fulfill, because, in the absence of military agreements under the Charter to enforce its decisions, those decisions have behind them only moral force and the weight of world opinion.

These dangers become more acute as United Nations activities tend to revolve around the policies of the two blocs now forming inside it, each headed by a super power and around each of which lesser powers find themselves, sometimes uneasily, clustering. Pressure, on the one hand, friendly and almost unconscious, on the other, undisguised and ruthless, is sometimes exerted on the smaller members of the United Nations to identify their own policies with one or other of the group leaders. It is becoming too difficult to avoid this, as the feeling develops "you must either be for or against us, when we are so right and so strong, and the other fellow is so wrong and so strong". It is increasingly hard for countries, especially those which have become known as middle powers, to maintain a position of independence and objectivity in the United Nations in the face of this growing division between the Great Powers. It becomes hard to reach a collective decision, based on reason and argument, compromise and conciliation. The trial is one of strength, not of right.

There are, of course, many and fundamental points of difference

between these two groups, the Totalitarian and the Democratic groups; between their policies and tactics and above all, their ideals. There is also a difference between their degrees of solidarity. The Slav group always -- or practically always, except when one member is dozing and doesn't get the signal -- votes as a unit. They really are a block. The Western democratic group, composed of free states, underlines and may occasionally risk that freedom by the very frequent division of its voting strength. Voting chips often fall off that block. It may be, of course, that one group votes always as a unit because it is always right, but this explanation is, to say the least, unconvincing. It may also be that other states vary their support for each other because they are confused or, on the other hand, because the need for voting solidarity is not so great. This also is an inadequate explanation. The fact is that certain states -- democratic states in the progressive and not the reactionary sense of the word -- try to vote as they think right on any given issue, a process which is not always as easy as it should be; made even less easy by the fact that our divisions are gleefully exploited by those who vote to order.

In the face of misrepresentation of motive and distortion of result it becomes tempting not merely to vote with your friends, but to vote against those who will not be your friends. Any other course, you fear, may leave you open to the charge of weakness, of giving aid and comfort to the opposition. This, no doubt, works both ways, with a depressing and dividing result. As the former Secretary of State, James Byrnes, once said:

"I sometimes think our Soviet friends fear we would think them weak and soft if they agreed without a struggle on anything we wanted, even though they wanted it too".

One result of this suspicion between the two strongest powers is a growing tendency to appoint to United Nations political Commissions of investigation and enquiry, middle and small powers only. This is, in a sense, a measure of the deterioration that has developed in relations between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A., because it is, I suppose, a confession that, in political agencies set up by the United Nations, the chances of common agreement are decreased by the membership on them of those two powers. Additional responsibility is, therefore, thrown on smaller states. This creates a situation of some difficulty and, at times, embarrassment, especially for countries like Canada. In the case of very small powers, they are protected to some extent by their very smallness from the consequences of the decisions which they take. The great powers, of course, have always their own protection through the veto, but a middle power, like Canada, can, as two wars and many conferences have shown, make an important contribution to the achievement of victory in war or of a diplomatic decision in peace. This makes its support for policies advanced by others of real value. We in Canada are beginning to realize that our new position of middle power, which we have been rather inclined to boast about, is not without its disadvantages. Being in the middle is not always a comfortable place.

Smaller powers, should not be asked to undertake United Nations duties which their more powerful associates find to be irksome, dangerous or embarrassing. They should not be asked to play roles in the international drama which should be performed by the stars. There are times when, if it is impossible for the stars to act together, a particular play should not be staged at all.

Furthermore, the United Nations, while giving smaller powers more jobs to do, is not giving them the power to do them. There have been several examples of this in recent United Nations history, and they all point to the necessity of taking collective responsibility for, and putting collective force behind, decisions which have been taken collectively. A good illustration of this essential need is the action

of the recent United Nations Assembly in relation to Palestine.

There is another point. When disputes reach the Security Council, not enough use seems to be made there of procedures for private and informal discussion and agreement. There is a tendency to rush at once into angry and unproductive public debate during which positive statements are made and firm positions taken. This makes conciliation and compromise difficult; the stand previously taken has become a headline in the world's press and there is nothing so difficult for a government to abandon as a headline. I am a great believer in frank and open diplomacy, in open covenants, openly announced, but often quietly and confidentially reached. There is more to diplomacy than an irresistible desire to talk to the press "at the drop of a hint". This, however, is by way of digression.

Does all this mean that we should give up the United Nations as a too difficult, if not too good a job? Not at all. That would be suicidal as well as cowardly. The weaknesses that have been displayed, the difficulties that have been encountered, together with the deterioration in the world situation, mean that we should work harder, far harder than we have before, to build up our international organization into an effective instrument for the preservation of peace with enough force behind it, to back up decisions which it has freely taken against their violation by others, even by its own members. That is the obligation - of acceptance and enforcement - which members undertook when they signed the Charter. But the force necessary to carry out these decisions, must be brought under some form of international control.

The inalienable right of a nation to repel as best it can an unprovoked attack, must remain. Even the most law-abiding citizen in the most effectively policed city has that. If some one jumps on him out of a dark alley, he can do his best to fight back. He doesn't wait until the neighbours or a policeman appear. But with this exception, the United Nations must, if it is to be effective, have adequate force under its sole control, to implement its decisions. This force, which would consist largely of forces of the member states, must be capable of being brought into action quickly as a result of an international decision which cannot be blocked by any one power.

You will of course complain that this is impractical and impossible. My reply is that at the moment it certainly is but that it is an objective which must be reached; a purpose that must be realized. The alternative is international anarchy in an age of guided missiles, guided bacteria and guided hatreds. The so-called realist who can get any comfort out of that alternative is my idea of an optimist. He is also my idea of a man burying his head in the sand.

It is also idle to complain that surrender of absolute control over national forces means an infringement of national sovereignty. Of course it does, but every nation, even the permanent members of the Council with their veto, when they signed the Charter gave up some part of their national sovereignty in the interests of a greater security. If they are going to benefit from that surrender, they must be able to implement collective decisions by collective police action, which alone can guarantee collective security. There is no other way. Peace never has been, and I venture to suggest never can be, preserved on any other basis. This does not mean disarmament. It means, not the abolition of the truncheon, but putting it in the hands of a policeman, rather than a prowler.

I am, I hope, realistic enough to know that the process of putting enough power in the hands of the United Nations to overawe and keep in check any nation that may harbour aggressive intentions, is going to be a long, tough one. I know also that as long as the power of veto

exists and is used, the international policeman would, to say the least, have some difficulty in getting a decision to use his truncheon, even if he has it, except possibly against urchins stealing apples. The experience, so far, in Palestine, shows that he may be timid in using it even in cases where only little fellows are involved.

The basic difficulty and danger is, then distrust and suspicion between the Great Powers. Should we not, however, in the face of that distrust, indeed possibly because of it, look to our international organization and see how we can strengthen it?

There is no doubt that organic strengthening is impossible as long as the veto exists and can be used, as it has been used, without effective limitation. It does stand in the way of genuine collective security organized and made effective through the United Nations as it exists today. I know that a formal attempt to abolish that veto at this time, would mean the quick break-up of the organization. Nevertheless, just as something has been done, much more can be done to limit the effect of the veto, and thereby make the United Nations stronger without driving any state out of the United Nations unless it is looking for any excuse to get out.

There is the limitation that can be imposed by custom and convention. That has already determined, for instance, that mere abstention from voting does not necessarily bring the veto into effect. Furthermore, permanent members of the Council who are willing to do so can impose on themselves self-denying ordinances - as indeed some have done - not to use their veto in whole categories of questions which come before the Council. This may have some effect on the others.

What do we do, however, if disunity and suspicion between the Great Powers causes the veto power to be used irresponsibly and selfishly and if any limitation of that power, by custom or by an amendment of the Charter, is impossible? What do we do then to build up an international agency capable of keeping the peace, because it will have sufficient power, under international control, without the veto, to enforce its decisions.

Three courses are open. One, to carry on as we have been, in the hope that the international situation may in time improve to the point where the defects and weaknesses of the Charter which now seem so glaring, will become academic, and where the unanimity of the Great Powers will be expressed positively, by action for peace, and not merely negatively, by inaction against war. Until that day comes, the greatest service the United Nations can perform is by keeping alive; by providing a meeting place and a platform where all nations are given at least the chance of talking out their differences, instead of fighting them out. Meanwhile, changes can be made in the structure of the organization as its foundation becomes more solidly based on better international relations.

That is one course. A second, at the other extreme, is to insist on a suitable amendment of the Charter, and if that is blocked by a veto (amendment is subject to the veto) then to scrap the present organization and form a new one, with a Charter which will permit it to work. If any state wishes to stay out, that would be its privilege and its responsibility.

This is a drastic course which should, of course, be adopted only as a last desperate resort.

There is a third way which is much to be preferred to this extremity though it is not nearly so satisfactory as an agreed limitation of the veto by convention or by amendment of the Charter would be. This course would retain the present Charter, but would frankly recognize that

within the present United Nations certain members were determined to form a collective system which would really guarantee their own collective security, even if this could only be done on a limited basis of membership.

At the recent General Assembly of the United Nations, the head of the Canadian Delegation, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, put this idea forward forcefully in the following paragraph:

"Nations, in their search for peace and cooperation, will not and cannot accept indefinitely and unaltered a Security Council which was set up to ensure their security, and which, so many feel, has become frozen in futility, and divided by dissension. If forced, they may seek greater safety in an association of democratic and peace-loving states willing to accept more specific international obligations in return for greater national security. Such associations, if consistent with the principles and purposes of the Charter, can be formed within the United Nations. It is to be hoped that such a development will not be necessary. If it is unnecessary, it will be undesirable. If, however, it is made necessary, it will take place. Let us not forget that the provisions of the Charter are a floor under, rather than a ceiling over, the responsibilities of member states. If some prefer to go even below that floor, others need not be prevented from moving upwards."

Such a limited association for collective security - within the United Nations and acting within the letter and spirit of its Charter - would not be an offensive and defensive alliance of the old type. There could be nothing "offensive" about it because it would be bound by all the obligations and restraints of the Charter.

It would, on the other hand, be much broader and go much deeper than the alliances of old. It would be a genuine pooling of resources, spiritual and material, for purposes of collective defence. Nor would such an association exclude any state from membership which did not exclude itself. It would threaten no state and no state would have anything to fear from it which based its own actions on the principles and provisions of the Charter. It would merely be the recognition by certain states of the necessity of a collective system for defence which would be really effective; for accumulating under international control and outside the veto such a terrific preponderance of power that no one would dare to commit an aggression.

There is no reason whatever why any state which is unwilling to accept these additional commitments should withdraw from the United Nations itself which would continue in its present form.

Such a security system could, and indeed must, establish beyond doubt that it was solely an instrument of peace, and that it would not be used to further selfish national or imperial interests, or to support aggressive power politics by any of its members.

A collective security agency within the United Nations which could prove both its good-will and its power - two things which don't always go together - might hope eventually to attract to its membership all states in the United Nations. We would, then, in fact, have secured a new United Nations with both universality and effectiveness. If that does not happen, however, through no fault of the collective security group, we would at least be no worse off than we are now. We would know where we stand and that would, I suggest, be on firmer ground than where we are now. For we would have ensured that superior power - political, military and moral power - would be on the side of those who are determined to use it.

If we can secure that result, we would then at last have some reason to hope that peace might be preserved and that life on this planet might continue to exist.